VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

MAY 1998

Director's Column

William L. Woodfin, Jr

My first words this month must be to thank those of you who helped support the passage of HB 38. You may recall that this is the legislation that, effective July 1, 2000, will send to this Department a portion of the current sales tax that is collected on hunting, fishing and wildlife related purchases. This revenue will allow your Department of Game and Inland Fisheries to continue to provide the quality services that you expect of us.

Again, thanks for your support of this important legislation.

May 30th through June 7th will be National Fishing Week. And while most of us think of fishing as fun, it is important to remember that fishing is also big business. The American Sportfishing Association estimates that anglers in Virginia have spent tens of millions on their sport; and that spending brings jobs, dollars and tax revenue to our economy. Even those who never cast a line may reap the benefits of this ancient pastime.

Still, for most of us fishing is pleasure unadulterated by thoughts of money. When we think of fishing we think of the ticking of the reel as we drag our ever hopeful lure through our favorite lake or the swishing of the line overhead as we cast artful shadows on the surface of a river. We are, as the narrator in *A River Runs Through It* is, "haunted by waters." National Fishing Week is a good time to pass on that enchantment to someone else in your life. Children are ready to be spellbound, eager to love what you love. Teaching them to fish teaches them to love, respect and conserve the wild places in our world and the wildlife that fills them. Adults can be a harder sell; they may think they can find easier and more gratifying ways of spending a day off. But once you get them out there, once they've seen a heron angling along side them just a few yards off, once they've felt that flutter in the stomach as the fish hits the hook, then you have a lifelong fisherman. So coax your bowling buddy, office mate or neighbor out to the water and watch as sportsman or woman is formed.

I can't allow May to pass by without telling you that now is the best time to go see the wildflowers at the G. Richard Thompson Wildlife Management Area. Located on the Western edge of Fauquier County, the 4,000 acre area is home to millions of wildflowers, especially the beautiful large flowered trillium, but also the showy orchid, yellow ladies slipper and Mayapple and bloodroot. Last May as I walked along the old fire trail, surrounded by flowers, my head rang with the words of Gerald Manley Hopkins: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out, like shining from shook foil…nature is never spent; There lives the dearest freshness deep down things."

This May, make a trip to the area and fill your head with your own poetry.

Mission Statement

To manage Virginia's wildlife and inland fish to maintain optimum populations of all species to meet the needs of the Commonwealth; to provide opportunity for all to enjoy wildlife, inland fish hunting and other outdoor recreational pursuits; and to prevent loss of lives and property in connection with boating, hunting and fishing.

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VIRGINIA WILDLIFE

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Dedicated to the Conservation of Virginia's Wildlife and Natural Resources

VOLUME 59 NUMBER 5

Largemouth Bass in Virginia

Wanted: freshwater fish, must be challenging to catch, and able to grow to bragging size. Also must be able to lure anglers into traveling great distances, and spending countless hours and dollars to catch.

by Gerald Almy

There may be no other fish that draws so much attention to so many anglers as old bucket mouth.

If you're in Virginia, you're in bass fishing territory! Largemouth bass are found literally everywhere in the state, including the mountains, piedmont and tidewater areas. Bass are at home in half acre farm ponds to sprawling impoundments. There's literally no place in the state more than a few miles from a bass fishing spot. No matter where the weekend excursion, vacation or conference may lure you, there is largemouth bass fishing nearby.

That's why many anglers consider Virginia as a bass fishing mecca. Combine bass fishing with the many other cultural, historical and natural attractions, and it is easy to see why Virginia is a favorite spot for fishing and families alike.

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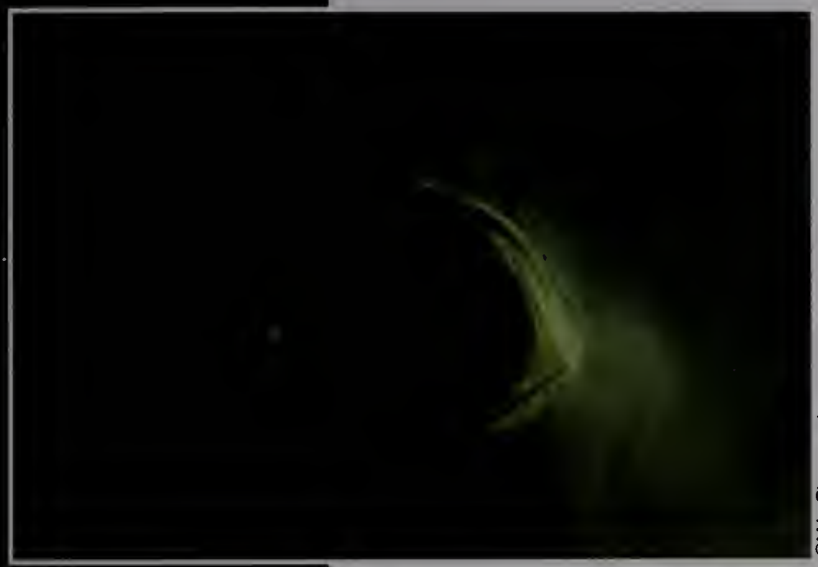
What is the Largemouth Bass

The largemouth bass is one of the most sought after freshwater game fish in Virginia. And it isn't hard to understand why. Just take a look at it! Its muscular frame, broad caudal fin (tail) and large extensible mouth all mark traits of an explosive predator. With a push from its tail, a largemouth can swiftly lunge from hiding to attack nearby food. The largemouth opens wide to create a suction that pulls its prey in. Even though they are aggressive battlers, largemouth have no dangerous teeth, just sandpaper-like lips. Once in the mouth, prey is crushed in the back of the throat and swallowed. In many of Virginia's popular fishing lakes, largemouth bass can average three to five pounds. Many of Virginia's lakes and reservoirs have the potential to produce big bass. How big is big? Well in Virginia, lakes like Briery Creek and Lake Conner have put marks in the history books with bass in the 10 to 15 pound range. When the word spreads that big bass abound, its no wonder that Virginia's lake and reservoirs attract anglers from all over who spend countless hours and thousands of dollars fishing for bass.

Largemouth bass can vary in color and shading depending on the clarity and color of their home waters. In general, the back of the head and upper sides of the largemouth will be grayish-green. They have cream colored lower sides and stomach, and a band of dark green flanks the sides along the lateral line. In some waters this is quite prominent, in others it is virtually invisible.

The largemouth bass *(Micropterus salmoides)* is joined by two other black bass species in Virginia waters, the spotted bass *(Micropterus punctulatus)* and the smallmouth bass *(Micropterus dolomieu)*. The largemouth bass can be distinguished from the other two by the lower jaw. On the largemouth bass, the jaw extends well beyond the eye, whereas on the other two it ends just below the eye.



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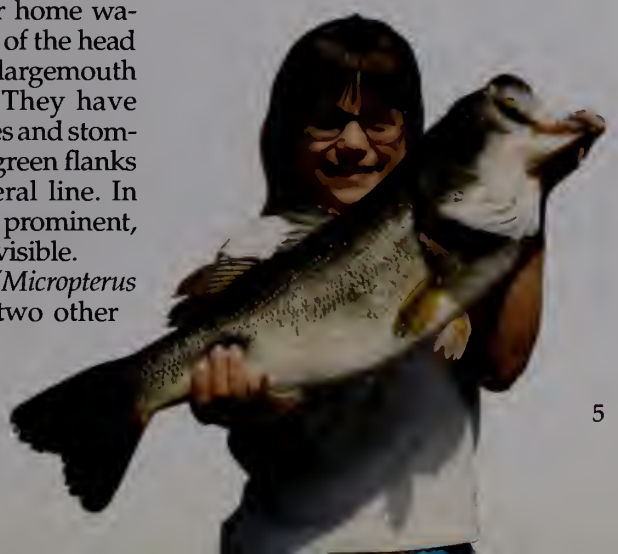
Life as a Largemouth Bass

Largemouth bass spawn in spring as water temperatures rise into the 63–68° F. range. In Virginia, this can occur as early as March or as late as April, depending on factors like location and water depth. To find these water temperatures, bass will move into shallow water areas from one to eight feet deep, such as coves, backwater sloughs, feeder creeks and shallow bays.

After locating a suitable hard bottom such as gravel, sand or clay, the



males build saucer shaped nests by fanning out depressions. Nests can be as large as 30 inches across and are often nestled near what is commonly referred to as hard structure like stumps, logs, docks, mud or aquatic grasses. Largemouth bass are very territorial and require up to 30 feet between nests. Most largemouth bass spawn beginning in their second year of life. The females join the males over the nest, where they expel from 2,000–7,000 eggs per pound of body weight. The males release milt (sperm) which fertilizes the eggs as they settle in the bed.

The eggs and fry (newly hatched young) make tempting morsels for other fish. Sunfish are particularly troublesome predators. Depending on the water temperature, eggs can take anywhere from two days at 72°F and as long as 13 days to hatch when water temperatures drop to 50°F. During this time, the males stand guard, with no attempt to obtain food for themselves.

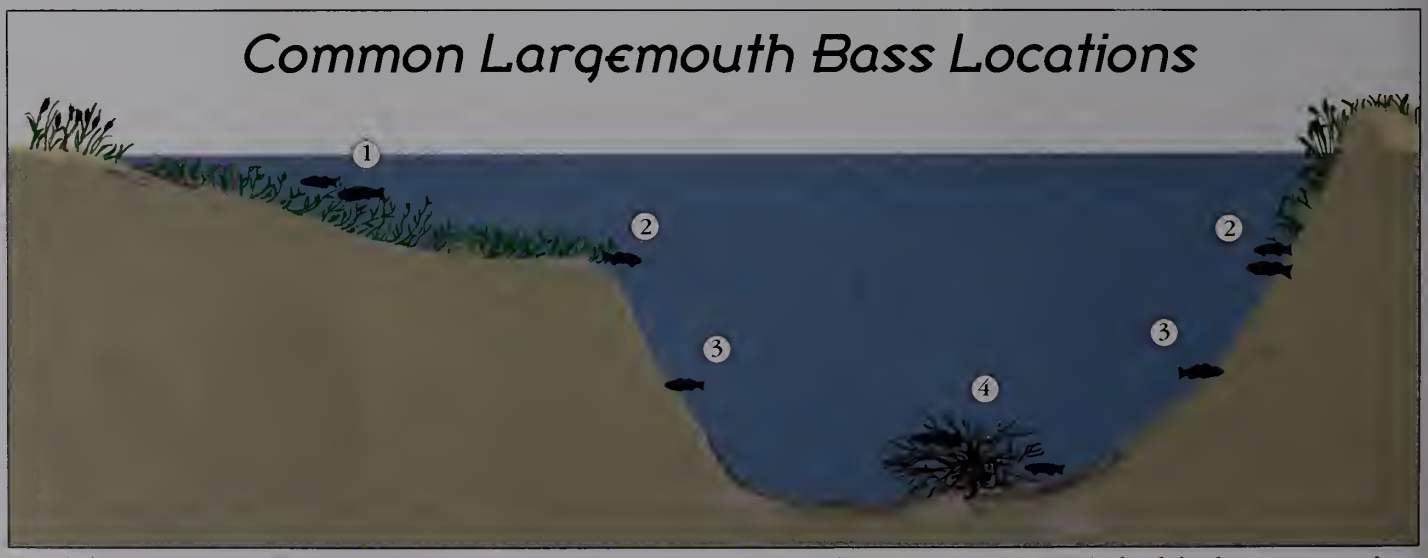
The young feed on zooplankton. About a week after hatching, they leave the nest to find protection among weeds and underwater structure. Now they are fair game to all the predators that lurk about. Mortality is high for fry. Fingerlings fall prey to aquatic mammals, waterfowl, diving birds and other fish. It is estimated that in a typical nest of 2,000 to 12,000 eggs, only five to 10 are likely to survive to reach 10 inches in length. Those that do survive do a creditable job of avenging their fallen comrades by quickly making their way to the top of the food chain. The young that survive grow rapidly during the first two years. Although the rate can vary between locations and water conditions, on the average bass grow to eight inches in the first year of life and to 13 inches in their second year, probably attributable to their protein packed diet. The rate of growth slows with age. Small crustaceans, insects and small fish become an important part of the largemouth's diet when it reaches fingerling size. As the insatiable young fish grows, it consumes larger prey including frogs, tadpoles, crayfish and mice. Upon reaching seven inches or so, largemouth bass feed on fish, including minnows, small sunfish and shad, which are the single most important food item in the adult diet. Adults can live 10–15 years, though very few make it that long.

Haunts and Habits

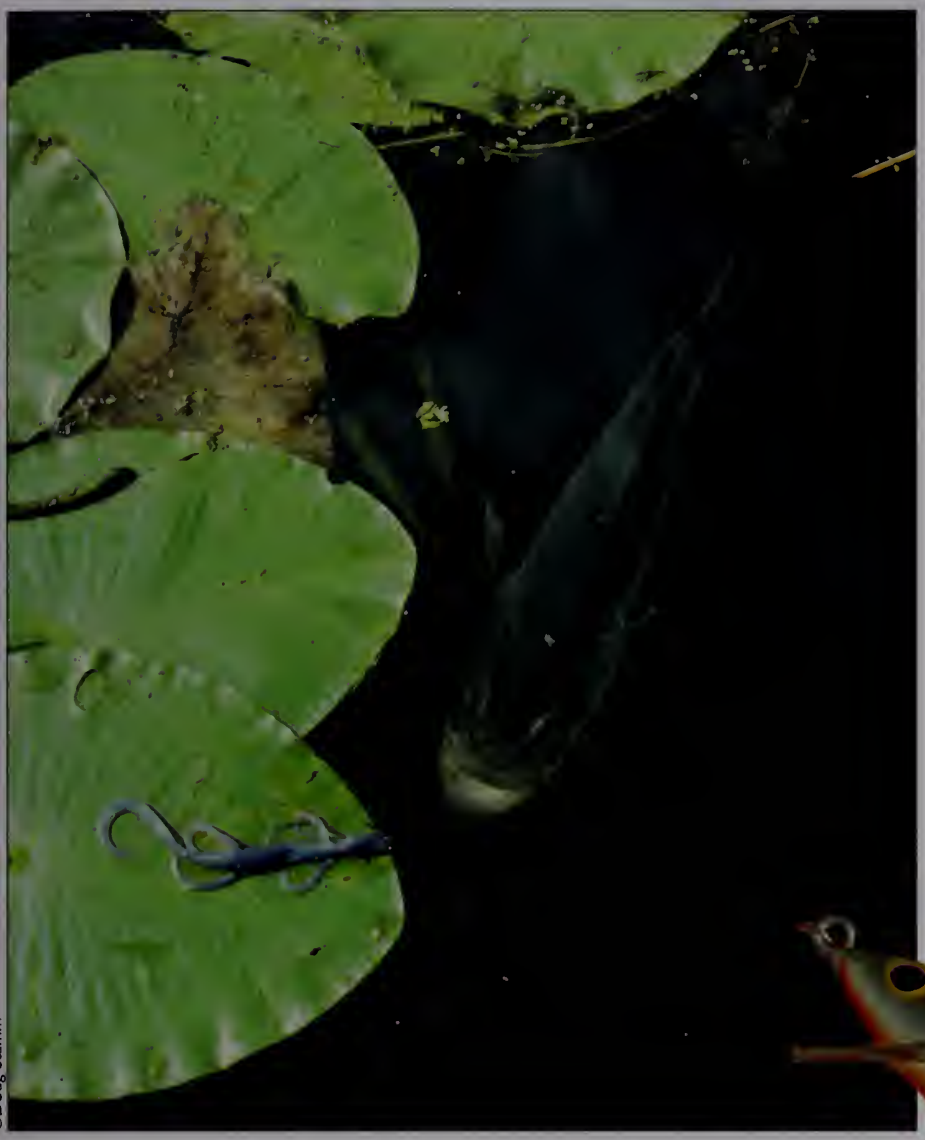
The largemouth bass is a fish that orients strongly to "structure." Anglers use this term to refer to any type of object or cover that is attractive to fish. Favorite structures of the largemouth bass include docks, fallen trees, flooded timber, rocks, stump fields, riprap, bridges, vegetation edges, channel markers, boat houses, points of land, shoals, humps, creek channel dropoffs and undercut banks. Many people create artificial reefs in an effort to create structure for bass.

The largemouth's use of structure basically dictates its way of life whatever it's habitat—large impoundment, river, creek or pond. At times, during the summer and fall, largemouth will school in tight packs and roam open water where they feed on pods of shad or minnows, as a rule, most bass are either loners or hang in loose groups around structure. Feeding takes place in shallow to moderate depths near cover, where they can lie in ambush for baitfish to move into view. From their ambush points they lunge out and suck in the prey along with large amounts of water, which is expelled through the gills.

The key to finding largemouth in Virginia's large impoundments is first to locate the depth of water where they are holding, then fish the structure in that area. They will usually be found in water where the temperature is closest to their liking. Throughout most of the year, the water in our large impoundments is "stratified" into layers, with differ-



(1) shallow water during spawning time and warmer weather; (2) holding along structure next to the bank in the summer and early fall; (3) suspended off deep ledges during the colder months; (4) holding next to structure, natural or man-made throughout most of the year. Illustration by Pels.



©Doug Stamm

ent temperatures in the different layers. Finding fish in these situations usually requires the use of logical deduction or a thermometer. But twice during the year, once in spring and once in fall, the water "turns over," mixing all the temperature layers together. During this time, bass spread out and use any level of the lake they choose. This makes locating them more a game of trial and error. Though bass occasionally move into waters as deep as 60 feet, generally they inhabit shallower waters. They are at home either near the shoreline or further out from the bank where variations in bottom depth occur.

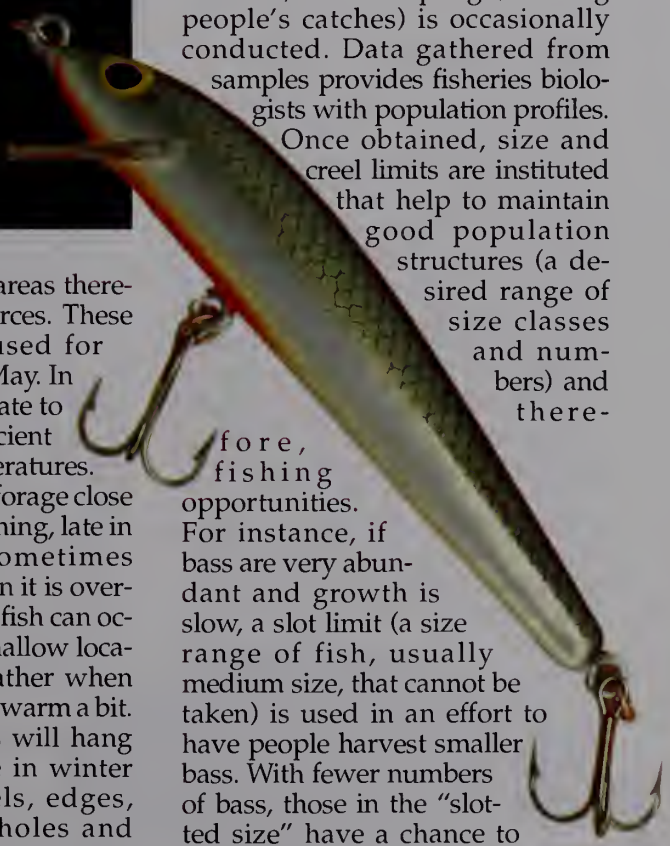
In late winter and early spring, largemouth often use water from one to six feet deep. The water warms quickly in these areas thereby attracting food resources. These same areas are also used for spawning in April and May. In June, fish begin to gravitate to deeper areas to find sufficient oxygen and cooler temperatures. They will, however, still forage close to shore early in the morning, late in the evening and sometimes throughout the day when it is overcast or drizzly. In winter, fish can occasionally be found in shallow locations during sunny weather when the water near shore will warm a bit. For the most part, bass will hang tight to deep structure in winter such as creek channels, edges, humps, washed-out holes and bridge pilings. They also eat less often and move slowly.

Management of the Largemouth Bass

Numbers and size...that is what bass anglers around Virginia want when it comes to largemouth bass fishing. And that's what they get!

When most people think of increasing numbers of fish they think of stocking. In the case of largemouth bass in Virginia, stocking took place in the 1800s. Bass are now well distributed throughout the state, with most waters having naturally reproducing populations. At present, stocking is used primarily to start new populations in new or renovated sites.

Bass are managed primarily with fishing regulations that limit the size and numbers of fish that can be safely removed from existing populations without upsetting the delicate predator-prey balance. Bass populations are checked regularly in public fishing waters with electroshocking being the most common method employed to obtain fish samples. In addition, creel sampling (checking people's catches) is occasionally conducted. Data gathered from samples provides fisheries biologists with population profiles. Once obtained, size and creel limits are instituted that help to maintain good population structures (a desired range of size classes and numbers) and therefore, fishing opportunities. For instance, if bass are very abundant and growth is slow, a slot limit (a size range of fish, usually medium size, that cannot be taken) is used in an effort to have people harvest smaller bass. With fewer numbers of bass, those in the "slotted size" have a chance to grow larger. Setting low creel limits helps to protect "trophy



fisheries" when fishing pressure is high. They also help when trying to maintain a large number of catchable size fish.

Fishing for Largemouth Bass

One thing that attracts so many people to bass fishing is that it can be a challenging fish to catch. On the other hand, not so difficult as to be frustrating. Sure, it takes more skill to coax one of these solitary predators into striking than some of its gregarious cousins like the bluegill or crappie, but not as much skill as luring other fish like muskie. Bass can be relatively simple to catch. And each angler has the option of adding challenge to the sport by choosing different methods of pursuit.

Bait Fishing for Bass.

Using bait is a very common and effective means of landing largemouths. It is considered by some to be "the easy way." Even if that is the case, which it isn't necessarily, bait fishing can offer great action, especially for the novice or casual angler, and, it's usually less expensive than fishing artificials. Bait can be bottom drifted, still fished on the bottom or suspended from a float. In winter and summer, fish will locate in water 15–35 feet if available. At these times of the year drift, slow troll or still-fish with large live shiners or shad on size 1/0–#2 hooks. Use just enough weight (either split shot or egg sinker above a barrel swivel) to make the bait stay in the strike zone. In spring, bass will be up in the shallows. Lip or back-hooked minnows or dangling nightcrawlers placed under a float and cast to likely cover such as logs, weedbeds, docks or points are irresistible meals. Or, slowly cast and retrieve liphooked shiners and minnows. Bottom fishing with crayfish, frogs, waterdogs and nightcrawlers is appealing to bass spring through fall.

Lure Fishing for Bass.

Getting bass to strike artificial lures is the sporting challenge sought by most avid bass anglers. Persistence is probably the most important item in the tackle box. But other elements of traditional bass fishing gear include a 5 ½ to 7 foot spinning or baitcasting rod with 6–17 pound line and a variety of spoons, spinnerbaits, buzzbaits, plugs and plastic worms.

During winter bass will be deep and move slow. A good tactic at this time is vertical jigging over fish or deep structure (brush piles, dropoffs, channel edges and humps) with ½–1 ounce "slab" spoons such as Hopkins. Slow-crawling rubber-skirted jigs tipped with a pork frog is another good bet. As fish begin to move into the shallows in March and April, relocate your fishing into coves, on flats and near shoreline cover. Cast spinnerbaits, crankbaits, soft plastic jerkbaits and lizards. As the water warms spawning nears completion in April and May, bass slowly start to move deeper again. Topwater lures produce well during early morning and the last hour or so of daylight. During midday, fish deep with a plastic worm, grubs and crayfish rigged either Texas or Carolina style. In fall fish often go on a feeding binge to store up energy for the winter. A variety of lures will score, including crankbaits, spinnerbaits, soft plastics, buzzbaits and vibrating rattlebaits.

Fly Fishing for Bass.

Having a bass explode on a surface fly is about as dramatic as it gets. For this reason, fishing for largemouth with "long rods" is also exploding in popularity. For those who would like to try it, it is best to come armed with a 6–9 weight outfit, a weight forward or bass-taper floating line and 6–9 foot leader with an 8–14 pound tippet. When fish are willing to take flies on the surface, go with cork, balsa or soft foam poppers as well as deer hair frogs and mice. Drop them in shallow water and near cover. Let them sit as long as you can stand it, then twitch. Or try retrieving streamers such as the Clouser Minnow or Woolly Bugger

with sharp 12-inch tugs of the line. Some people prefer to crimp on a split shot a foot in front of the fly, or use a sinking-tip line to get the offering down a couple feet.

Responsible Angling

In years past, largemouth bass were clipped to the stringer without regard to the effects on future fishing. Taking fish for the frying pan was the ultimate outcome. Today things are changing. Anglers are interested in helping to maintain healthy populations of largemouth bass.

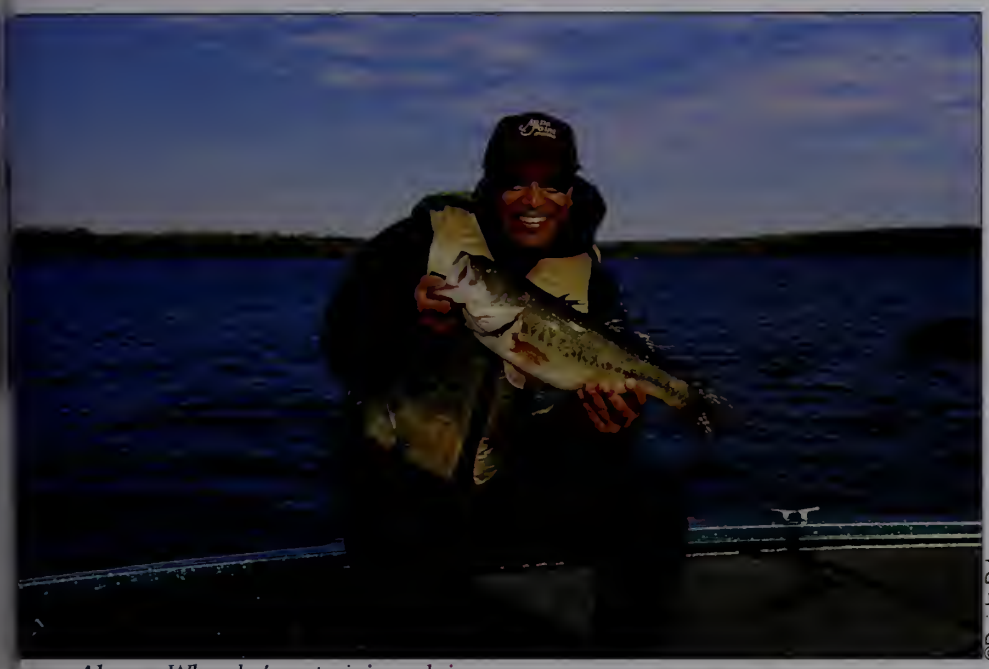
The great thing is that bass populations in Virginia are not presently in any danger of decline. Yet, anglers can be instrumental in making sure they stay that way.

"Responsible harvest" is the code of ethics used by most bass anglers today. This means that not all bass fishing needs to be catch-and-release. Harvesting bass is perfectly fine and in many cases, beneficial to the bass population. So, take fish according to the regulations, take only those that you will use and release the rest unharmed.

Every bass angler knows that largemouth are hardy fish and when handled carefully can almost always be released unharmed to grow larger and fight again. The one thing that every bass angler should do is learn to "lip" bass. Simply grasp the fish by placing the thumb of one hand inside the mouth against the lip with the rest of the hand under the lower jaw. Fish should then be held vertically. Raising them to a horizontal position, while holding them only by the jaw, can break the lower jaw, impairing them from feeding again. If raising them to a horizontal position is necessary, support the weight of the fish with the other hand. Handling fish as little as possible is the best thing for the fish. Use forceps or needlenosed pliers to remove hooks. Practicing good ethics and teaching other anglers proper handling methods will save fish.

Live bait anglers can also save fish by learning to set the hook as quickly as possible on a biting bass so that the hook is not swallowed. In the event that it is, cut the line and leave the hook there to dissolve.

Not fishing over spawning beds and returning females with eggs are other covenants of conscientious largemouth anglers. Male bass guard the eggs and young while in the nest. Removing them from this protective role opens the eggs and young up to predation. If you do catch a male in this situation, releasing him quickly at that spot is preferable to putting the fish in a live well. Likewise if you catch a big female with eggs, allow her to complete her spawning.



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Above: When he's not giving advice on how to catch fish or selling tackle at Anna Point Marina, Dave Fauntleroy can be found on Lake Anna in his spare time practicing what he preaches.

Distribution and Places to Fish

Largemouth bass are a warm water species that live in freshwater and prefer temperatures between 50°F.–80°F. These temperatures are typical of many of the state's waters and the reason that largemouth are prolific statewide. In Virginia, largemouth find suitable homes in the vast coastal sounds, tidal rivers, farm ponds, large impoundments as well as nontidal rivers and streams.

In the western, mountainous third of the state, largemouth are found primarily in ponds, lakes and reservoirs. The cool water of the streams and rivers in this area are populated instead by its smaller cousin, the smallmouth bass.

In the Piedmont and Tidewater areas, anglers should leave no water unchurned as largemouth bass thrive in all the warmer fresh waters found there. Some of the best bass fishing in Virginia occurs in the tidal sections of rivers (that part of the river below the fall line) that wind through the eastern part of the state and opportunities for stillwater bass fishing in the eastern part of the state are also numerous.

So, there is no doubt that Virginia has plenty of bass fishing opportunities! But not all waters in the Commonwealth are created equal when it comes to growing trophy largemouth. The Virginia Angler Recognition Program recognizes a "trophy" largemouth bass as one that meets or exceeds 8 pounds or 22 inches.

To improve the odds of your line crossing the path of a hefty largemouth, write for your free "Freshwater Fishing Guide" published by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, which is an excellent way to help you locate that special fishing lake, river or stream. The Freshwater Fishing Guide will give you information such as locations and how to get there. What are some of the special features of each body of water and a list of what fish species you will likely find. It's also important to point out that not all great largemouth bass fishing in Virginia requires the use of boats. Some excellent bank fishing opportunities and handicapped-accessible areas are also available and are listed in the the Freshwater Fishing Guide. ☐

Gerald Almy has been a full-time outdoor writer for more than 20 years. He is currently a field editor and on the staff of Sports Afield *magazine.*

©Gerald Almy

Tidal River Bass

Virginia is blessed with thousands of miles of tidal rivers that challenge the angler with ever changing conditions.

Story and Photos by King Montgomery

All bass are not created equal—tidal river bass are stronger and more aggressive than their pond, lake, and reservoir cousins primarily because they must contend with flowing water caused by the tides shift four times a day. River bass are built like football linebackers, tough and compact, yet speedy with great endurance and leaping ability.

Virginia is blessed with several tidal rivers that support populations of largemouth bass. The James River and its tributaries, particularly the Chickahominy River, are quality bass fisheries. The James River hosted the Bass Anglers Sportsman Society (B.A.S.S.) Bassmaster Classic tournament, the Superbowl of professional bass fishing, three times, from 1988 until 1990.

Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries biologists Dean Fowler and Mukhtar Farooqi consider the Chickahominy largemouth bass population to be abundant and healthy in this picturesque river with a cyprus-studded shoreline. A good place to launch your boat on the "Chick" is at the public landing in the Chickahominy Wildlife Management Area on Morris Creek.

The Mattaponi River, formed by the joining of the Matta, Po, and Ni rivers, has excellent water quality and is one of the cleanest, most pristine lowland tidal rivers in the Eastern United States. In addition to largemouth bass, the river supports outstanding populations of channel and white catfishes, yellow and white perch, sunfish, and a good run of anadromous striped bass.

There are nice largemouth bass above the Indian Reservation on the Pamunkey River and some smallmouth and spotted bass above Route 360. These three basses, all members of the genus *Micropterus*, are found together in only a few Virginia drainages.

The Pamunkey and Mattaponi Rivers converge at West Point, Virginia, to form the York River, which is brackish water that sustains saltwater fishes.

Largemouth bass fishing is so good on Virginia's tidal rivers that the largest organization devoted to bass fishing, Bass Anglers Sportsman Society, hosted its national championships, the Bass Master Classic, on the James River three years in a row. ***Left to right:*** *Ray Scott, President, B.A.S.S., Gary Martel, DGIF Fisheries Chief, William Woodfin, Director of DGIF.*

The Piankatank River is a small tidal river that holds good numbers of largemouth and striped basses. In its upstream reaches, the Piankatank becomes Dragon Run, a scenic river that courses through cypress swamps and heavily forested areas. Dragon Run, also known as Dragon Swamp, supports a largemouth bass population in addition to sunfish, chain pickerel and other gamefishes.

The tidal Rappahannock River is a superb bass fishery from the fall line at Fredericksburg to Tappahannock where the saltwater begins to dominate and other fish species prevail. There are some smallmouth bass mixed in with the largemouth

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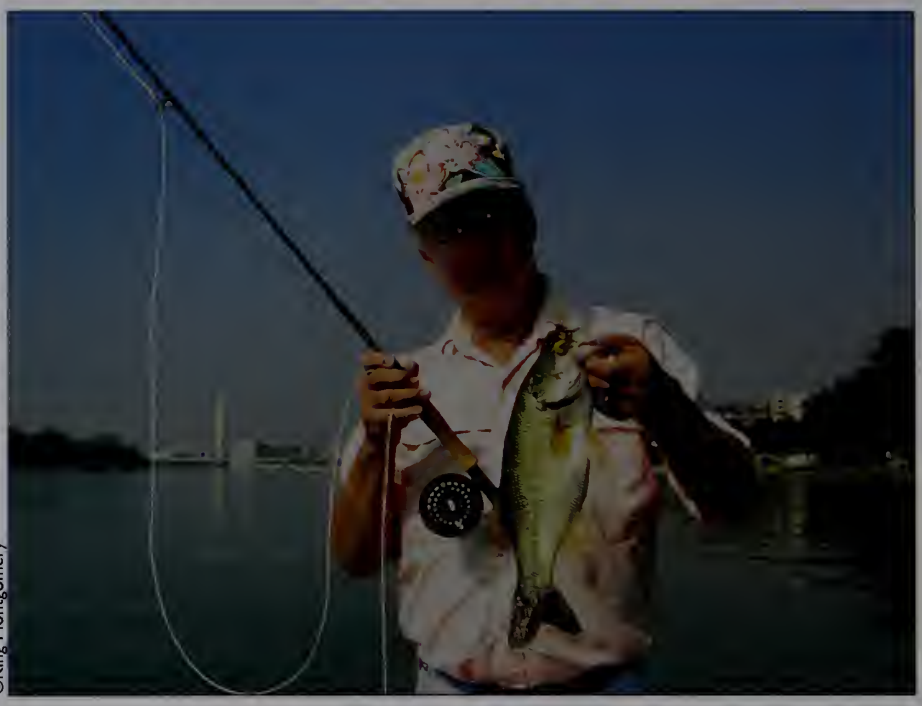

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Top: *The tidal Potomac River is the boundary between Virginia and Washington, DC from near the Chain Bridge to the Woodrow Wilson Bridge, a stretch of 11 miles. The boundary is a great place to catch largemouth bass, sometimes in the shadows of the Nation's monuments.*
Above: *Flies and lures that mimic prey found in nature are very effective for catching tidal river bass. Here are several bass flies, left to right a mouserat, hairbug, and blue damsel.*

population, particularly near Fredericksburg.

Although the tidal Potomac River "belongs" to the State of Maryland, except for the 11 miles through the District of Columbia, the fish don't know it, and spend a lot of time near the Virginia shore and in the many Virginia tributaries. The Potomac River system is one of the nation's premier bass fisheries and annually hosts hundreds of bass tournaments from local clubs, state and regional bodies, and several professional bass fishing circuits. Some of the better bass fishing Virginia tributaries of the tidal Potomac River include Little Hunting Creek, Gunston Cove, Occoquan Bay and River, Chopawamsic Creek, Aquia Creek, and Potomac Creek.

Tidal River Largemouth

Tidal river bass have more of an "attitude" than their stillwater cousins; they are tougher, more aggressive, and more adaptable to changing conditions. They will chase a fly or lure farther and faster, pull harder and longer, and jump higher and more often than their pond, lake, or reservoir kin.

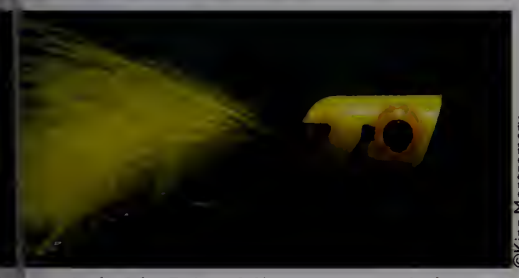
Well-known fishing guide and author Ken Penrod has fished Virginia's tidal rivers and the Potomac River for decades. In his excellent 1991 book, *Tidewater Bass Fishing*, he recounts his observations of tidal and impoundment bass he kept in a aquarium. Generally, when he placed a tidewater bass and an impoundment bass of near equal size in the tank, the former dominated the space while the latter cowered out of reach. Penrod reports, "In cases where the impoundment bass was slightly larger than the tidal cousin, the tidewater bass eventually took command of the aquarium. When the tidal bass was significantly smaller, the larger fish was boss but was subject to sneak attacks."

Bass from tidal waters do not grow as large as impoundment bass, probably because they have to constantly cope with moving water produced by the tides. Reservoir and lake bass do not burn as many calories in their relatively lethargic lives. They can eat a few shad or crayfish, and quietly digest them in their lair, not having to expend much energy fining to maintain their position. Tidal bass often must chase rapidly swimming prey against a strong tide and must use up much more energy just to maintain position. A good, bragging size tidal river bass is, in my opinion, any fish over five pounds. A lunker impoundment bass usually has to weigh seven pounds to draw any attention.

Tidal River Angling Tactics

Bass fishing in tidal rivers is better when the water is moving. I pre-

fer to fish the last 90 minutes of an outgoing tide and the first 60 minutes of the incoming tide after the intervening slack water period. The low water at low tide reduces the habitat available to the bass, and the outgoing water pulls baitfishes from cover such as pad fields, and small guts and feeder creeks. Fish the edges of spatterdock or other shallow, shoreline vegetation. The bass will be positioned on the edge, facing upcurrent, waiting for the tide to flush the baitfishes and other prey out of the pads as the water recedes. At dead low tide when the water is slack, the aquatic ecosystem takes a break and activity slows appreciably. After you have fished in tidal waters for awhile, you can actually "feel" this eerie lull between the tides. You can still catch fish, but it takes some hard work. When the tide begins to move back in, the activity increases as the baitfishes move back into the cover to feed on insects and plankton, and the bass wait on the edges, still facing into the current but now in the other direction, to intercept them.



©King Montgomery

Left: The Prissy Miss popper, made from space-age closed-cell plastic foam, is a Virginia creation from Mr. Bob's Lucky Tm Day Lures, Inc of Herndon. ***Right:*** *The ubiquitous Clouser deep minnow was invented by smallmouth guru Bob Clouser. The fly and its numerous derivatives catch about any fish that swims, including tidal river largemouth and striped bass.*

Anglers with high-powered bass boats can actually chase the tide up and down on a large tidal river and fish only moving water on a given day. Tide tables, a watch, and a fast boat are all you need to practice this style of bass fishing. Some of us, though, prefer to move less and fish more, while enjoying the quiet river and its surroundings rich in sights and sounds from the resident flora and fauna. My bass boat seldom gets to run more than 40 miles an hour, and then for not very long.

While impoundment bass hang around natural and man-made structure, tidal bass do so even more. There are times on a lake or reservoir where bass, either singly or in small schools, roam the open water in search of prey. Tidal bass much prefer to be near structure that provides cover and a current break. Look for tidal river bass to be close to stumps, fallen trees, aquatic vegetation, bridge pilings, boat docks, points, and rocks. Much like a trout behind a rock in a fast-flowing stream, tidal bass seek shelter from tidal current and wait for baitfish or other prey to wash by. The clever angler targets such places with lures or flies that mimic or roughly imitate or suggest things for the bass to eat. Cast up-current and bring the offering down; the bass' eyes are focused upstream.

On stillwaters, fishing is often best, particularly in the warmer months, at sunrise and sunset because the black basses, like many fishes and other organisms, are crepuscular, that is, they become active at twilight. On tidal rivers this holds true as well, particularly when the water is moving at first or last light. The times during twilight are optimal for catching bass on surface lures or flies on about any body of water.

Tackle for Tidal Bass

Spinning, baitcasting, or fly gear are used in tidal river bass fishing, and top water angling with a surface fly is my favorite way to fish. During

The Perfect Fish

In his 1881 classic, *Book of the Black Bass*, James A. Henshall, MD, described his "perfect fish," the black bass, as "Inch for inch and pound for pound the gamest fish that swims." Dr. Henshall also said the bass "will eventually become the leading game fish of America." He was right.

Henshall also made some interesting observations on the relative fighting qualities of the smallmouth bass versus the largemouth bass:

There is a widespread and prevalent notion that the small-mouthed Bass is the "game" species par excellence, but I doubt if this distinction is well founded. In common with most anglers I at one time shared this belief, but from a long series of observations I am now of the opinion that the large-mouthed Bass, all things being equal, displays as much pluck, and exhibits as untiring fighting qualities as its smallmouthed congener.

And he was adamant about which method of angling was "best":

Artificial fly fishing is the most legitimate, scientific and gentlemanly mode of angling, and is to be greatly preferred to all other ways and means of capturing the finny tribe. It requires more address, more skill, and a better knowledge of the habits of the fish and his surroundings than any other method.

Agree with Dr. Henshall or not, he had a way with words.

—*King Montgomery*

©King Montgomery

If you choose to release your catch, it's important to handle each fish carefully, returning them to the water quickly so they may again test the skills of the next angler who is fortunate enough to tackle this marvelous fish.

periods of limited visibility—at first and last light, on overcast days, and during fog or light rain—tidal bass will attack lures and flies drawn seductively across the quiet surface of the water. You will see and hear the violent strike as the bass takes the bait, but wait until you feel the fish to set the hook.

Once the day becomes brighter, the bass will hold tighter to shallow cover or go deeper. I usually put down the fly rod and reach for a spinning or baitcasting rod rigged with a spinnerbait, crankbait, or a bottom-bouncing plastic worm. Properly armed, the conscientious angler is prepared to present a fly or lure from the top of the water to the bottom at any time of day under many conditions.

Use a 9-foot graphite fly rod for a 7 or 8-weight line, and a 7 to 9 foot monofilament knotless tapered leader with a tippet strength of 10–12 pounds test. Two fly lines are better than one. One reel spool should be filled with 20 pound test nylon backing and a weight forward bass taper floating line for surface and shallow fishing applications. Another spool is loaded with the backing and a sinking tip line to get flies a little deeper. If the water is muddy or stained, as it often is in tidal rivers, fly gear is much less efficient than other methods where large, flashy, noisy baits can draw strikes even in ugly water.

A 6–7 foot graphite spinning or a 6–6½ foot baitcasting rod with a medium or medium-heavy action are adequate for tidewater bass. Line should be in the 10 to 14 pound test range unless you are fishing in very heavy wood cover or in thick vegetation where line testing 17 to 20 pounds is better; the heavier line will take more abuse in the abrasive structure.

I believe the modern emphasis on competitive bass fishing with the goal of getting fish into the boat's livewell as quickly as possible causes some anglers to over-gun for bass. Pool cue action rods and reels holding 40–50 pound test line don't leave much room for sport. I also don't advocate ultra-light tackle for tidal bass because the fish can injure itself by fighting too hard for too long; the medium tackle range is more efficient, sporting and fun.

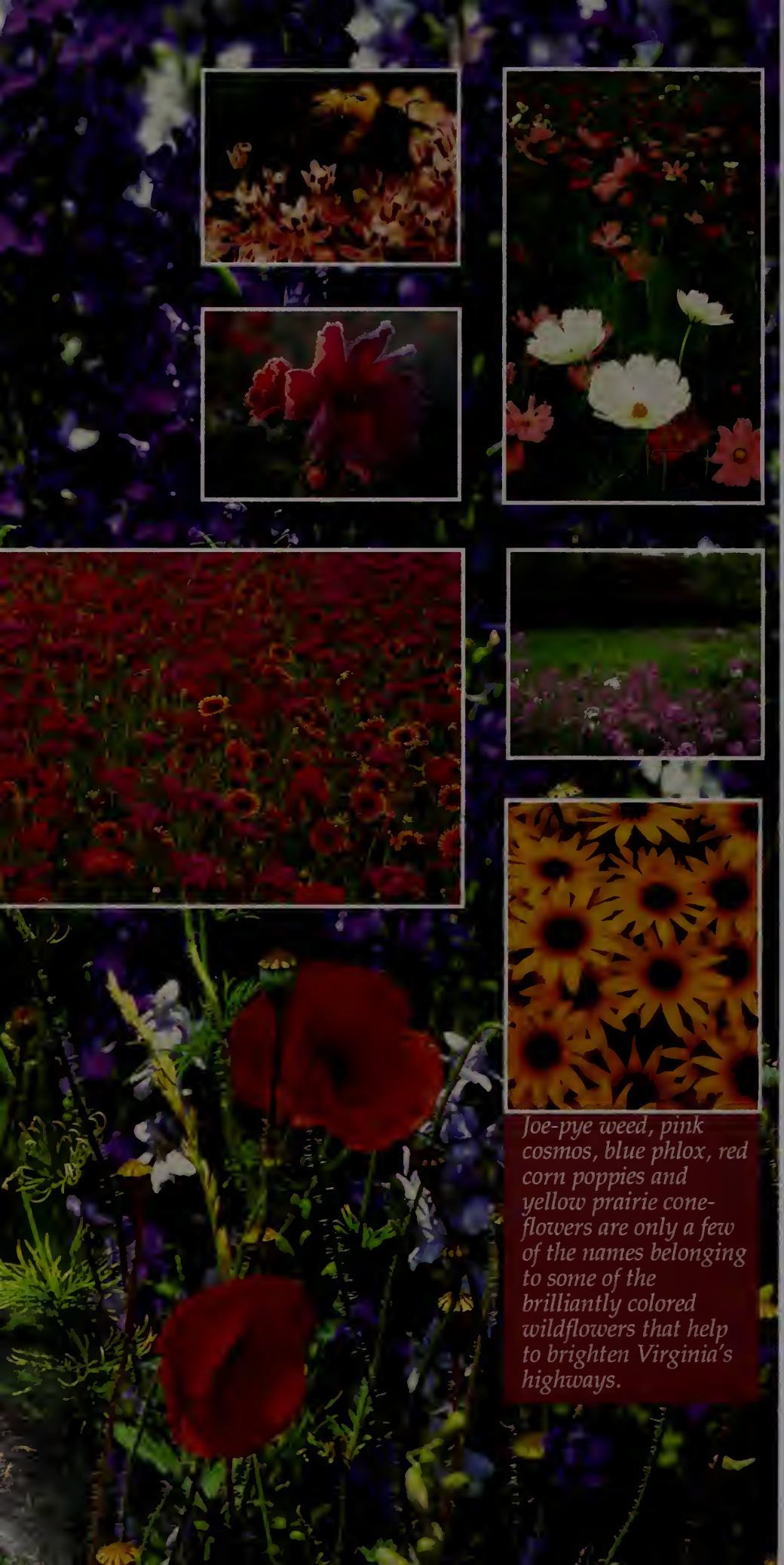
Catch and Release

Whatever fishing method or philosophy you use in pursuing tidal river bass, catch-and-release can be a good idea. Once brought to hand or net, treat the fish gently, remove the hook, keep its skin wet during a quick photograph or two, and let it swim quietly away. You will feel good and other anglers will thank you; the bass is free to make more bass and to be caught again another day. ☐

Outdoor writer King Montgomery is a light tackle and fly fishing guide on the tidal Potomac River. He lives in Annandale.

Editor's Note: Ken Penrod's book Tidewater Bass Fishing *is available in tackle stores or can be ordered by calling (301) 937-0010.*

Wildflowers Don't Care Where They Grow



Joe-pye weed, pink cosmos, blue phlox, red corn poppies and yellow prairie coneflowers are only a few of the names belonging to some of the brilliantly colored wildflowers that help to brighten Virginia's highways.

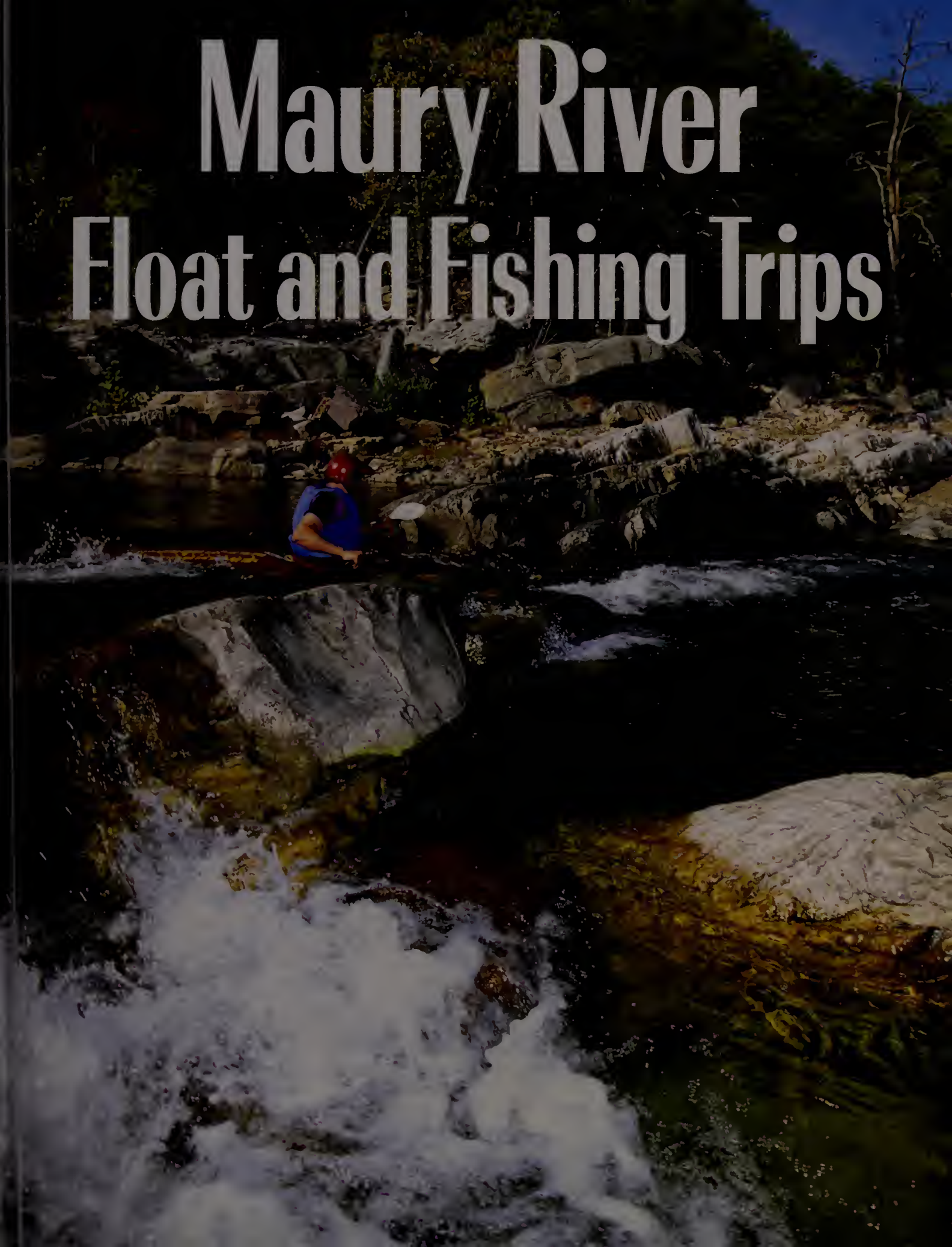
Story by Sarah White
Photos by David Everette

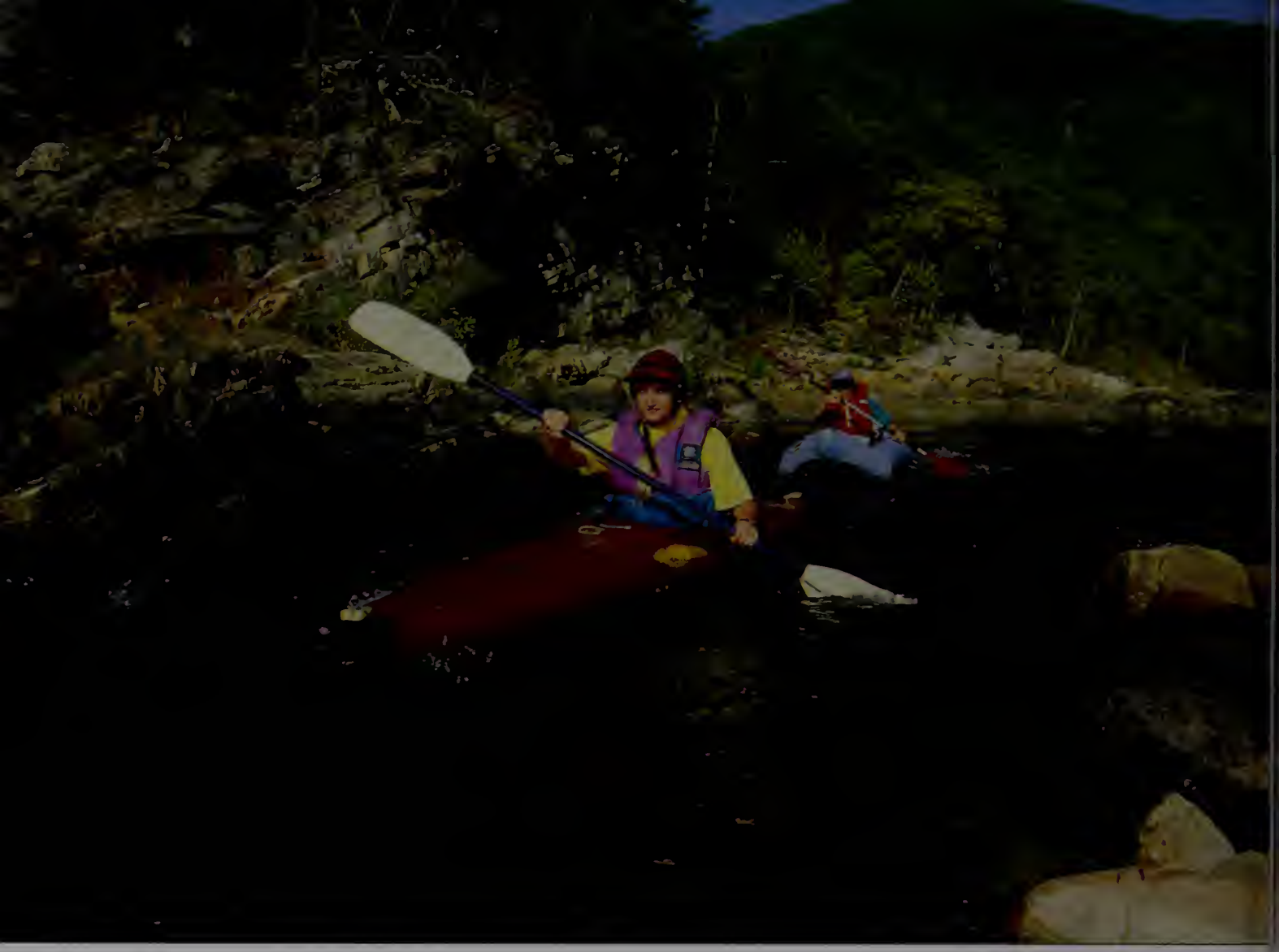
Anyone who has traveled along the highways of Virginia will surely have noticed that many of the median strips and roadsides are painted with bright swaths of color; in other words, that we have an abundance of wildflowers decorating our roadways. In fact, we are lucky enough to have almost one thousand acres of wildflowers along our highways, serene and glorious gardens blooming in the midst of concrete, asphalt and constant commotion.

Despite their natural appearance, these wildflowers are the work of a long standing program that involves the Virginia Department of Transportation or VDOT, Virginia Tech and volunteers from local garden clubs. About ten years ago, as part of a national program championed by Ladybird Johnson, VDOT workers began planting seeds and bulbs donated by such groups as The Garden Club of Virginia and the Virginia Federation of Garden Clubs. Although the program started small, it blossomed. Popular approval, increased funding and local involvement soon helped wildflowers spread all over the state.

Least anyone think that the wildflower program is in any way frivolous or wasteful, I hasten to point out that the flowers actually both save money by reducing the amount of costly mowing needed and even draw tourist dollars into our state by increasing the beauty of its roadways. The wildflowers also serve as an oasis for birds and other small animals, but their real importance is that of a safety function. The random patches of color reduce "highway hypnosis" on long stretches of road. Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, as E. B. White put it, "everything in life is someplace else and you get there in a car." VDOT's wildflower program increases the beauty, and thus the quality, of our everyday lives. □

Maury River Float and Fishing Trips





Story by Bob Gooch
Photos by Dwight Dyke

Traveling Interstate 81, you get a quick look at the Maury River just north of Lexington as it passes beneath a bridge underneath your wheels. If you're traveling U. S. Highway 11 instead of the interstate, you get a more intimate look at the river. But neither perspective gives you a true picture of this fast mountain stream that offers so much to so many outdoorsmen. Nor would the traveler who looks upstream or down know that the river gathers its headwaters miles to the north beyond U. S. Highway 250 which snakes through the rugged mountains between the western Virginia towns of Churchville and Monterey.

Small mountain streams, many of which hold native brook trout join to form the Calfpasture River which merges with the Little Calfpasture River just west of Goshen Pass. There the Maury River is born. The waters of the two major tributaries barely have time to mingle before the Maury enters the famous Goshen Pass and begins a turbulent run downstream, dropping as much as 20 feet in one 100 yard stretch of the river. Once through the Pass the river drops into the valley, continuing toward Lexington at a fast pace. It maintains that rate of flow, except where man has intervened, until it enters the James River at Glasgow.

Unlike most Virginia rivers the Maury is contained entirely within Rockbridge County. It does not cross any county lines. While nature designed the Maury as a fast-flowing stream from its headwaters to the confluence with the James, several dams have changed its personality. A pair of dams, an eight-foot one in Lexington and a 20-foot one near Buena Vista impound the fast water forming stretches of calm water behind them.

The Maury River is fairly short by most standards. From the confluence of the Calfpasture and the Little Calfpasture Rivers, it's approximately 30 miles to its confluence with the James River. En route it brushes the charming cities of Lexington and Buena Vista. While there is challenging whitewater such as Devil's Kitchen and other rapids too difficult for the novice to tackle, the river offers plenty of Class I and II water that the average canoeist or kayaker can handle. In addition to the fast water at Goshen Pass, there are the remains of Goose Neck Dam downstream from Buena Vista that require care. This is Class II+ water.

The names of rivers often raise questions from serious river lovers. How did the river get that name? Sometimes there's an explanation, sometimes none. There is, however, an explanation for this one. The Maury River was first called the North River of the James. It enters the James River from the north. But then came Matthew Fontaine Maury, a professor at Virginia Military Institute in the years following the Civil War during which he had served in the Confederate forces. In those postwar years he fell in love with Goshen Pass and requested that at his death his remains be carried through the Pass and on to Richmond for burial. An honor guard of Virginia Military Institute cadets carried out his wish. A monument in his honor now rests on the side of Virginia Primary Highway 39 where it passed through Goshen Pass. And the river was named for him.

Obviously the Maury River gets a lot of attention from whitewater canoeists and kayakers, primarily because of the Goshen Pass wild water. Most of this kind of river recreational use occurs during the colder months when the river is high. During the dry months of summer the river in this section is too low to canoe or even to use a kayak. The only exception comes when heavy rainfall in the watershed of the river raises its level significantly—even if for only a day or so. Thanks to the Goshen-Little North Mountain Wildlife Management Area, there is public access to the river through most of Goshen Pass. Virginia Primary Highway 39 follows the river and provides access in places. Downstream the river is considered a public waterway from Lexington to its mouth. While part of that section of the river brushes the George Washington National Forests, it is well to keep in mind that most of it flows through private land. Leaving the river to go ashore on private property is trespassing unless you have prior approval

The Maury River offers wildlife watchers an excellent chance to view a variety of wildlife species that live along the waters edge.

The Maury River does not enjoy a reputation for its fishing as do other Virginia rivers such as the James, New, Shenandoah, South Holston and others, but it does offer some interesting angling opportunities. The fishing might well be broken down into a trio of approaches; Goshen Pass, the fast water from Goshen Pass to the James River, and the still water behind the impoundments, primarily the 30-foot high dam at Buena Vista.

Let's take the rowdy waters of Goshen Pass first. This section of the river is top trout fishing water, Category A. That means that it is stocked once in October, November-December, and January-February. But it is stocked twice monthly in March, April, and May, the top trout fishing months in Virginia. Like so many Virginia trout waters, the water becomes too low and warm to hold trout through the summer. No doubt a few trout hide in some dark, deep holes, and make it through the summer, but not many. Trout are not released in June, July, August, and September. The October releases are often contingent upon the quality of the water. If a long dry summer spell extends well into the fall, the October stocking might be delayed.

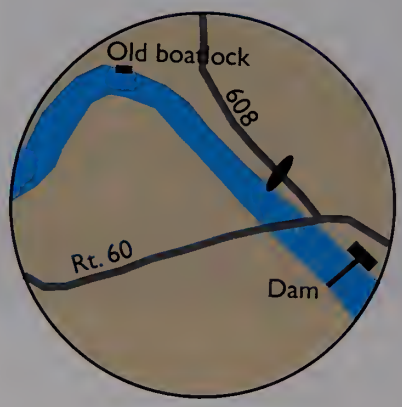
Want to know when the Maury was last stocked? Call 1-804-525-FISH. If the Maury was stocked the week of your call you will be advised. If it wasn't stocked the week of your call, the Maury will not be mentioned in the recording which your telephone call taps.

Another trout fishing opportunity is Guy's Run, which enters the Maury River from the Goshen tract of the Goshen-Little North Mountain Wildlife Management Area. This little stream has been identified by the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries as a wild trout stream. This means native brook trout fin its sparkling waters.

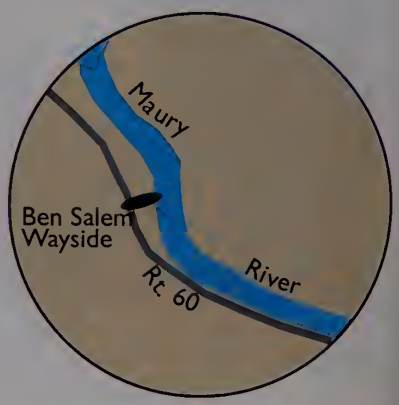
Maury Rive

Locher Landing

Glen Maury Park



Route 60 Take Out



Ben Salem Wayside

Float Trips

Goshen
Calfpasture
Goshen-Little North Mountain Wildlife Management Area
VDGIF
Lake Merriweather
Bean's Bottom
Maury
Alone Mill
Maury River
Goshen-Little North Mountain Wildlife Management Area
Rockbridge Baths
Cedar Grove
River
W
S
N
E

Rockbridge Baths

East Lexington Park

Bean's Bottom

Alone Mill

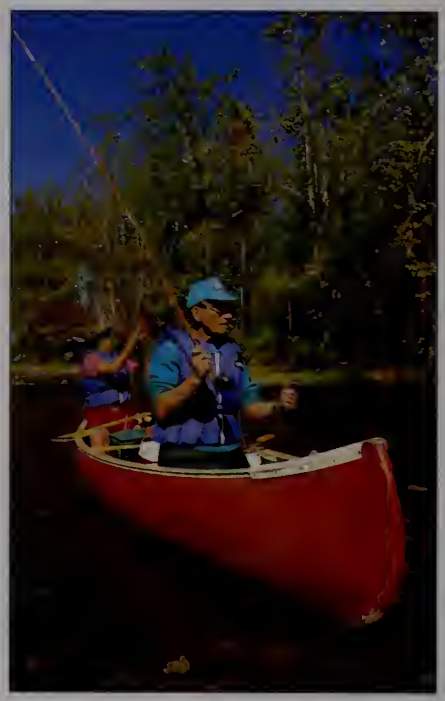
While the trout fishing is popular, the bass and sunfish in the river hold more appeal for many anglers. By bass, I mean smallmouth bass, the fish that has made the James River famous. You might catch a smallmouth bass anywhere from the headwaters where the Calfpasture and Little Calfpasture join to form the Maury, to the mouth of the river where it enters the James. Anglers frequently catch smallmouth bass while fishing the Goshen Pass waters for trout, but the best fishing begins downstream where the Pass waters become more gentle.

An ideal bass and sunfish trip might begin at the Glen Maury Park launching area in Buena Vista and end at the Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' Locher Landing near Glasgow. This is a 12-mile run and even a long summer day won't give you enough time to fish all of it. Just pace yourself and fish only the most productive water. If you are interested in shorter trips where you can cover the water more thoroughly, talk to Glenn Rose of James River Basin Canoe Livery, Ltd., R.F.D. 6, Box 125, Lexington, VA 24450, telephone 540-261-7334. He has spent over 20 years on the Maury and knows it like the back of his hand. He can probably give you some suggestions regarding entering and leaving the river. He also has a website full of good information and useful links at **http://CanoeVirginia.com**.

As is true of most fast smallmouth bass streams, the Maury River is loaded with scrappy and tasty yellowbreast sunfish. Many anglers release their bass and string a good catch of sunfish for the table.

In addition to the bass and sunnies the Maury holds populations of rock bass, another stream mate of smallmouth bass in the western part of the state. Other angling possibilities include the likes of carp, catfish, and suckers.

For the best of the Maury River fishing, I would recommend going fairly light. My preference is a light spinning outfit featuring a 4-pound test line—particularly when the water is gin clear. At other times you might want to move up to 6-pound test. Nothing heavier.



A number of years ago I found myself with a little time on my hands while visiting in Buena Vista. In those days I usually kept some fishing tackle in my car. I drove out to the impounded water behind the 30-foot dam in Buena Vista and began casting from the shore. It wasn't long before I had landed a couple of nice largemouth bass. I'm sure that the likes of largemouth bass and bluegills find a home to their liking in that still water. It's always worth a try.

I consider all fast-flowing inland rivers a possible haven for wood ducks, and just this past February, while viewing the river from East Lexington Park, I watched a trio of mallards leave the water and head upstream. I'm not sure how popular jump shooting for ducks is, but jump shooters on the James and a number of its tributaries enjoy good hunting. That could be still another charm of the Maury River. It's easy to understand why Professor Maury fell in love with Goshen Pass and the river that flows through it. ☐

Bob Gooch is a freelance writer and frequent contributor to Virginia Wildlife

Float Trips

Remember:

- Always carry a wearable PFD for each person in the canoe.
- Buy a fishing license if you're planning to fish, and read the fishing regulations.
- Always ask permission to use private property for any reason.

Goshen (Rt. 39) to Rockbridge Baths (Rt. 39):

Distance: 5 miles

Caution: This is not a beginner's trip. This is a trip for kayakers and whitewater enthusiasts. Huge boulders and dangerous rapids abound.

Put in at VDGIF Goshen/Little North Mountain WMA parking area located off Rt. 39. The road to the parking area is not marked, so keep your eyes peeled for a dirt road to your left 1.1 miles south of Rt. 601.

Rt. 39 parallels the river along Goshen Pass, where the infamous "Devil's Kitchen," a 100-yard Class IV stretch of whitewater thrills the most experienced of whitewater paddlers during high water. Many paddlers will run this section just below the picnic area alongside Rt. 39, take out, and run the section again. Several Class II-IV boulder gardens will greet you below Devil's Kitchen. The scenery in this section of the river is spectacular, with rhododendrons clinging to steep cliffs, and unsurpassed cascading water. Even if you don't bring a canoe or a kayak, this stretch can be fished by wading, and during the spring, trout anglers straddle boulders all along the river. Sunbathing and tubing with truck innertubes are popular pastimes in the summer.

There is a picnic area and restrooms about halfway through the trip, with limited parking. Take out on river left behind The Old Country Store next to the post office in Rockbridge Baths on Rt. 39. This is private property, so you must get permission from the store owner first before you begin your trip. The Old Country Store welcomes canoeists and kayakers, and has plenty of supplies to fortify you on your

journey, so be sure to patronize them if you choose to launch or take-out on their property.

Rockbridge Baths (Rt. 39) to Alone Mill (Rt. 622)

Distance: 8 miles

Caution: This is not a beginner's trip. Intermediate paddlers can handle this water, which includes Class II-III rapids, including rock gardens and a few ledges.

Put in on river right just below Rt. 39 bridge off Rt. 602. Wooded farmland, steep cliffs, hemlocks, and small caves dominate this section, and for anglers, smallmouth and sunfish abound. In the summer, the water can get low, and you will have to pull your canoe over the rocks, but the fishing is still good.

Take out on river left below the Rt. 622 bridge, but park on river right across the bridge. Be courteous and ask the adjoining landowner about taking out there before you begin your trip.

Alone Mill (Rt. 622) to Bean's Bottom (Rt. 631)

Distance: 5.5 miles

This is a great trip for beginners with Class I and II rapids, although in the summer when the water levels drop, there will be lots of canoe pulling over rocks. Put in on river left below the Rt. 622 bridge, but ask adjoining landowner for permission first. Park on river right across the bridge. Take out is on river left above the Rt. 631 (Furrs Mills Road) bridge.

Bean's Bottom (Rt. 631) to East Lexington Town Park (Rt. 11)

Distance: 2.5 miles

Put in on river left above the Rt. 631 (Furrs Mill Road) bridge. This is a short float, but worth it for anglers. Take out on river right at East Lexington Town Park on cement pad 40 feet upstream of 8-foot dam.

East Lexington Town Park (Rt. 11) to Ben Salem Wayside or Rt. 60 bridge

Distance: 6 miles

This is a suitable trip for beginners. One can also float this section with innertubes, but get ready for a long trip in the summertime when water levels are low. You will encounter the remains of two dams making for some Class I and II water

Inflatable rafts have become a very popular method of exploring rivers like the Maury. It is also very important to use all appropriate safety equipment.

along the way. This is a tranquil, isolated stretch of the river with woodlands along either side. You are bound to see wildlife, particularly wading birds and perhaps some waterfowl. Put in at East Lexington Town Park off Rt. 11. To get to the park, take Rt. 11 south, turn right on Moses Mill Road, where Rt. 11 splits directly over the bridge leading into the town of Lexington. Follow the road into the park. You will need to carry your canoe about 100 yards to the water.

Take out on river right at Ben Salem Wayside on Rt. 60. You will have to carry your canoe up a steep hill to the road. Or you can float another 1.5 miles and take out on river left above Rt. 60 bridge off Rt. 608.

Glen Maury Park (Rt. 745) to Locher Landing (Rt. 684)

Distance: 12 miles

This is a long trip for careful novices. If you plan on fishing, be selective about your stopping points. Otherwise you will find yourself still paddling on the river after dark. Put in at Glen Maury Park off Rt. 745. There are signs to the park from Rt. 60. Take a right off Rt 60. at Forge Road (Rt. 608). Take a left on Paxton House Drive (Rt. 745), which turns into Deer Haven Drive. Make a left on Maury River Road. The park provides camping facilities and a handicapped-accessible concrete landing for canoes and small boats.

You will encounter Class I and II+ rapids on this trip and the remains of several dams. Take out above the railroad bridge on river right at VDGIF's unimproved Locher Landing (Rt. 684) in Glasgow. □

Additional Resources:

James River Basin Canoe
Livery, Ltd.
Glenn Rose, owner
RFD #6, Box 125
Lexington, VA 24450
Phone: 540/261-7334
Web Home Page:
http://CanoeVirginia.com

Classic Virginia Rivers
by Ed Grove
Eddy Out Press
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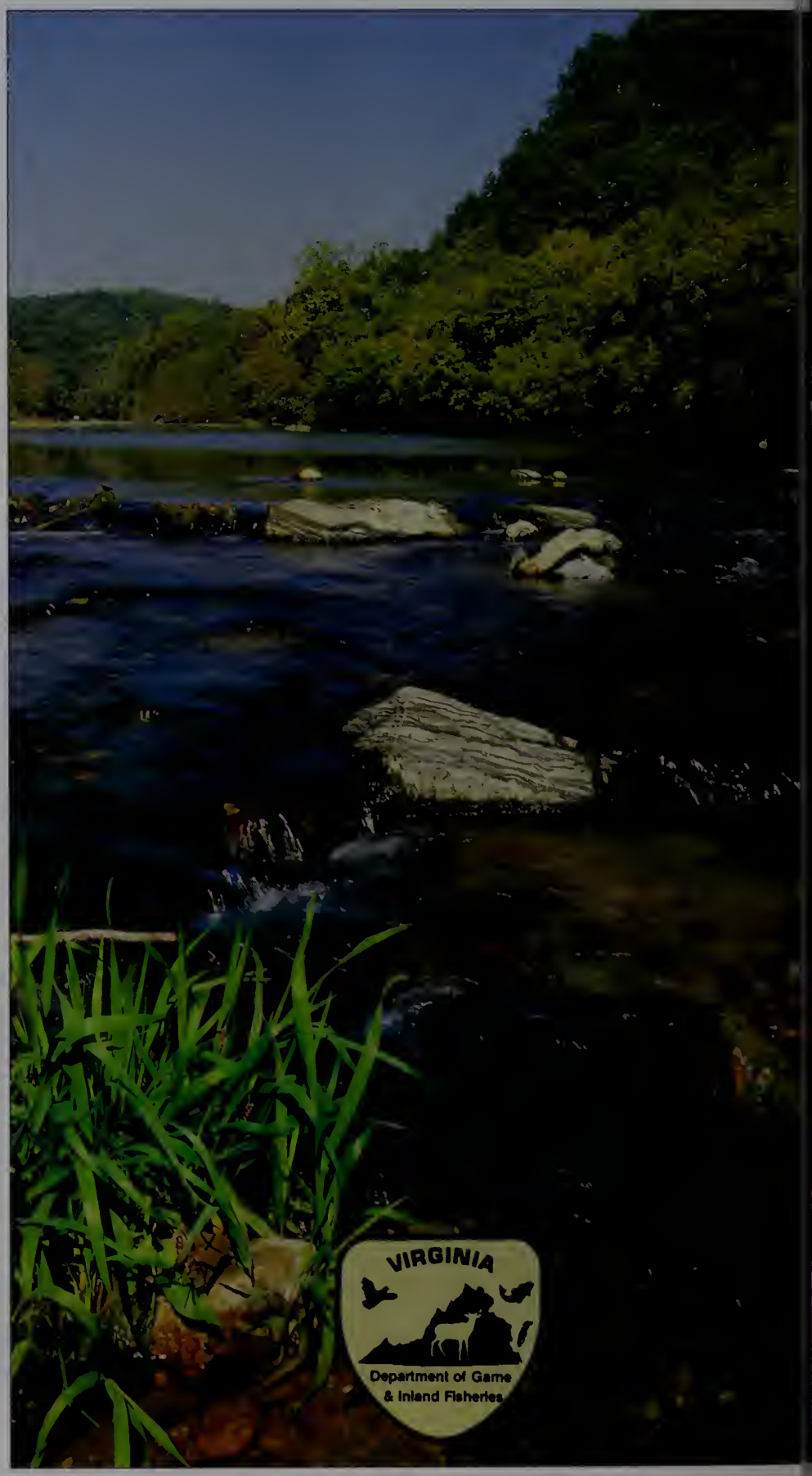


BASS
A Year in the Life

by Dean L. Fowler
VDGIF Fisheries Biologist

The fish...it lives in a murky world where sight is measured in inches or feet. How then does it know where it's going, or does it always? Most know the story of the salmon, it knows where it's going! But salmon are a migratory species who's quest for its stream of birth is essential to survival of the species. Largemouth bass on the other hand are not considered migratory. In reservoirs, they move back and forth between shallow and deep water seeking ideal temperatures and food. They've also shown the ability to return to

Why did the largemouth bass cross the river? Could it be to get to the other side? The answer to this and other perplexing questions may be on the road to being solved by VDGIF fisheries biologists.

their favorite haunts after being moved considerable distances by fishermen. Do tidal river bass get homesick? And if so, are they capable of finding their way home through the mazes of tidal marshes and against the forces of fluctuating tides, changing salinities from the invading ocean, and murky waters stirred by the swirling tides? It seems like a long shot. But it's something biologists need to know in order to properly manage tidal largemouth bass populations. This is especially true in the Chickahominy and James rivers, two nationally recognized largemouth rivers. Are these really "two" rivers, or one that has been artificially divided using names? Take this a step further; do these "two" rivers have separate largemouth bass populations or do bass come and go between them as they please? This question is especially important for the Chickahominy River, where bass angling is not just sport or recreation, it's a lifestyle. These guys and gals live and breathe bass; they bleed green and gold.

To have attracted so much attention, the bass fishing in the Chickahominy has got to be great. Right? Well it is, but, it would be better if the fish were bigger. Yeah, but every angler that's ever lived says that! True; but in this case there's something to it. Although largemouth are plentiful in the Chickahominy, most anglers agree that the James holds bigger fish. And a 1994 study of the fish populations of the Chickahominy by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries (VDGIF) indicated that its bass were growing somewhat slowly. Why? It could be that the James has a lot more backwater areas like the old gravel pits near Hopewell and Richmond. These areas function more like lakes, which are the habitats that largemouth bass are better adapted to. It could be that the popularity of catch and release fishing has led to a high population of bass that is competing for a limited supply of food. It could have something to do with the many catch and release bass tournaments held in the river each year. Many tournament anglers spend time fishing in the James because of its reputation for bigger bass. After returning to the Chickahominy for the tournament weigh-ins, their bass are released. Do these bass return to their James River homes, or do they stay in the Chickahominy? If they stay, they have to compete for food with the bass that already live there. This could affect bass growth rates.

If management measures (such as size or creel limits or seasons) are ever necessary to maintain or improve the bass population(s) of the James and/or Chickahominy rivers, we will need to know whether we're dealing with one large population or a separate one in each river. Other-

Dwight Dyke

Dwight Dyke

The first step in finding where bass like to roam is to go out and actually catch them. With a handful of high tech methods to accomplish this, biologists decided to do it the old fashioned way. They choose to use the "single line survey" method. Simply put, they had to use a rod and reel.

Dwight Dyke

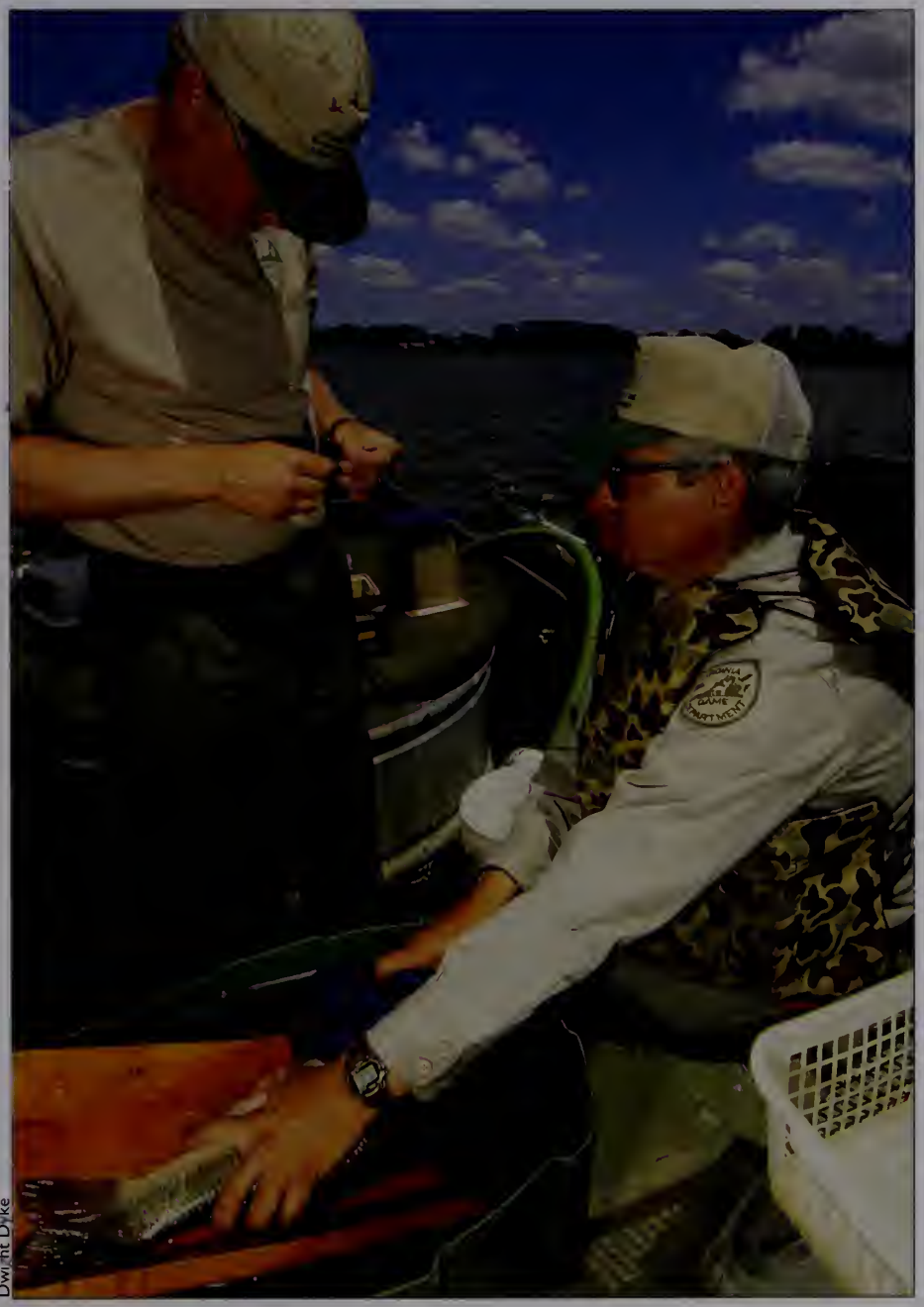
Dwight Dyke

Dwight Dyke

The goal was to catch 30 largemouth bass, big enough so each could be implanted with a small transmitter. Once caught, the fish were then weighed, measured and a scale sample was taken.

wise, we could be wasting our efforts trying to manage bass in each river separately, or vice versa. It was with these thoughts in mind that fisheries biologists at the Williamsburg Office of the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries decided to investigate further. Armed with 30 ultrasonic transmitters, they set out to document the travelling habits of largemouth bass in the tidal Chickahominy River. These transmitters are surgically implanted in the body cavity. They constantly emit a series of ultrasonic beeps in sequences best equated to Morse Code. Each tag has a unique code so that biologists can distinguish one tagged fish from another. These beeps are detected by placing a hydrophone under water and listening through headphones attached to an ultrasonic receiver.

To see if James River largemouth bass display a homing instinct after being caught by an angler and moved to the Chickahominy River, we decided to transport six bass from each of two common fishing sites in the James (in and around Upper Chippokes Creek and Ward's Creek) to three release sites in the Chickahominy (Walker's Dam, Helen's Hideaway, and Shipyard Landing). Real bass anglers were re-



Dwight Dyke

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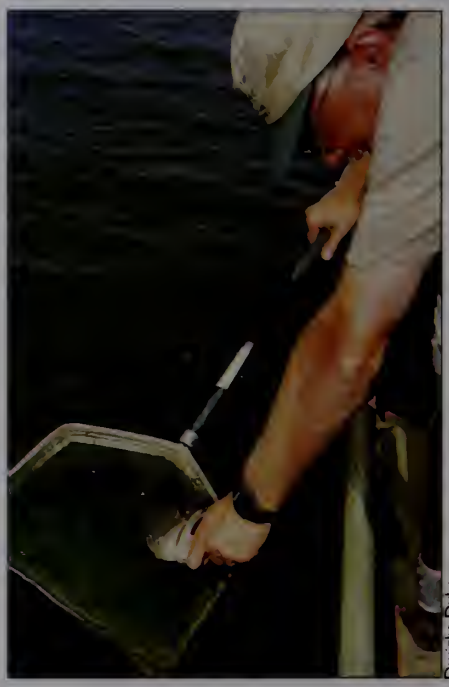
cruited to catch the fish for us after our feeble attempts at angling for them ourselves failed (just because we know where the fish are doesn't mean we know how to catch 'em). In a couple of cases we had to capture them using the electrofishing boat because our anglers couldn't catch fish big enough to tag (at least 13 inches) with rod and reel. For comparison, we also caught, tagged, and released two resident Chickahominy River bass at each of the three release sites. We also wanted to know if bass caught in Chickahominy Reservoir and released downstream of Walker's Dam would try to find their way back to the lake through one of the dam's two fish ladders. So, we caught, tagged, and moved three bass from the lake to the river just downstream of the dam. The initial tagging was accomplished in July and August of 1997. Additional bass may be tagged if many of the original fish disappear. A few may die from the stress of being tagged, some may be caught by anglers, and some will probably evade detection in the maze of marshes and creeks that border the river. Anyone who catches a tagged bass and finds the tag while cleaning the fish is requested to please contact VDGIF via the phone number or address on the transmitter. They are expensive and can be reused.


Dwight Dyke

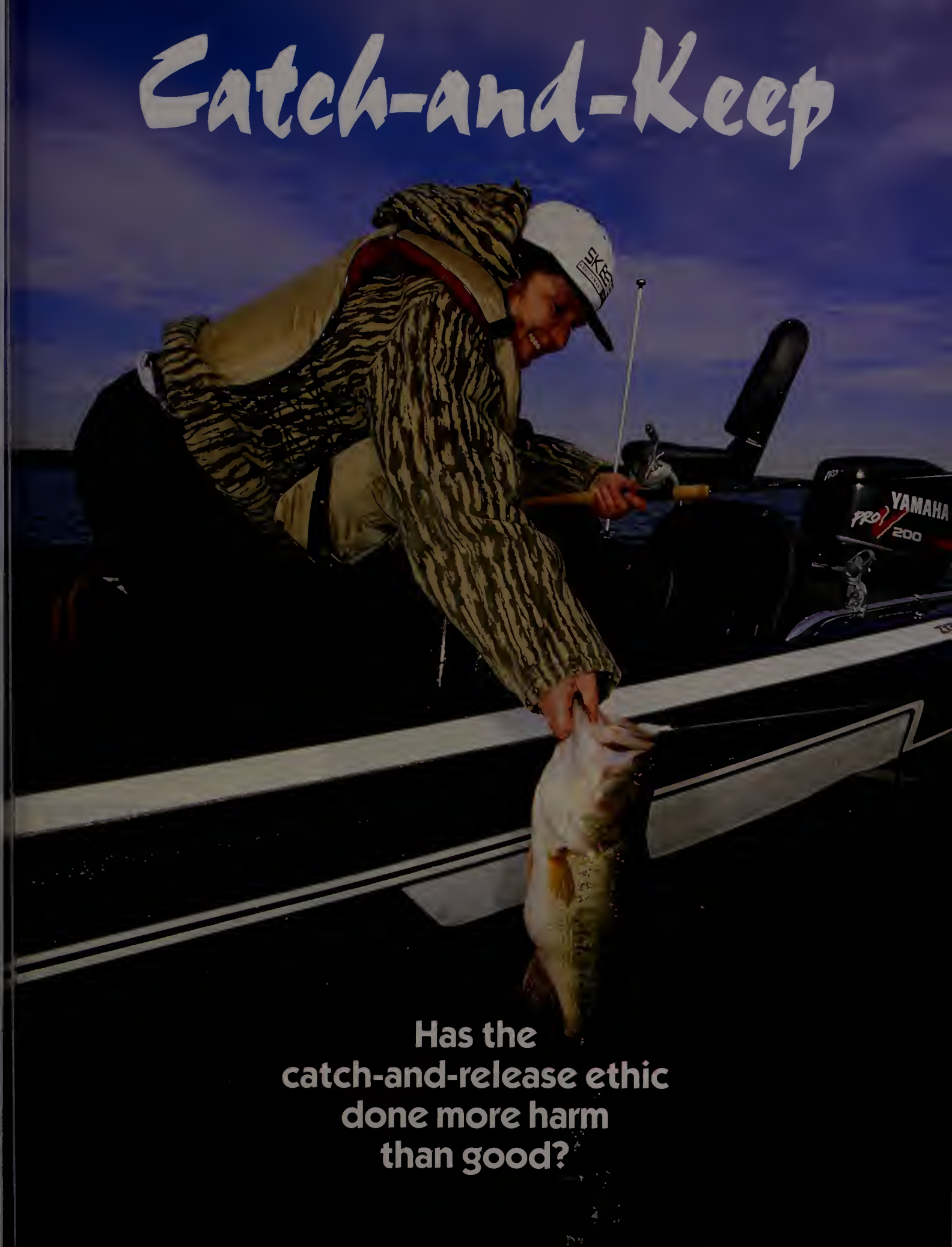
Dwight Dyke

A small ultrasonic transmitter like this one ***(top left)*** *was surgically implanted into the body cavity of each largemouth bass. The transmitter gives off a ultrasonic beep. Each transmitter has its own individual sound enabling biologists to distinguish one tagged fish from another. Once released with the implant, they are tracked by placing a hydrophone under the water, allowing the biologists to track the fish.*

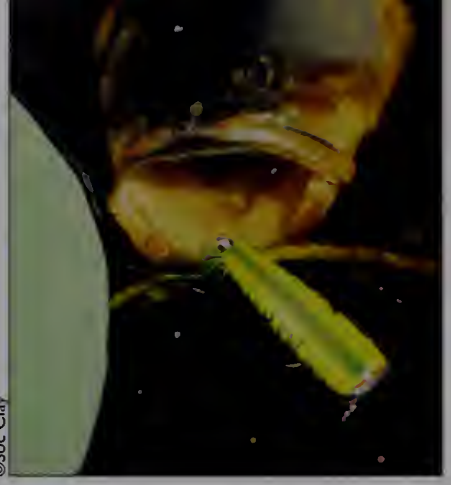
As long as tagged bass can still be located by our search team, we will continue tracking them for up to one year. This will give us a complete picture of bass movements during the heat of summer, the fall feeding frenzy, the winter doldrums, and through the spawning season. After the project is completed, we'll do a follow-up article to let you know what we've learned. It could make a great novel: "A year in the life of a tidal largemouth bass." Hmmm, it might even make the best seller list. ☐

Dean Fowler is a senior fisheries biologist with the Department working out of the Williamsburg office.

Catch-and-Keep



Has the catch-and-release ethic done more harm than good?



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by David Hart

Two anglers, one standing on the deck of a glitzy, high-dollar bass boat, the other seated in a small, faded green johnboat, glided towards each other, exchanging lively words on the merits of keeping fish.

They weren't talking about rights to what certainly was a productive spot on the lake, and it wasn't about who had the best tackle. All that discussion was generated over a fish. A 10-inch bass, to be exact.

That's how entrenched the catch-and-release ethic has become in many bass anglers. It seems the guy in the bass boat didn't like the angler in the johnboat threading a nylon rope through the lip of the little fish and adding it to three other frying pan sized largemouth already on the stringer. Obviously, those bass were meant for eating.

Such scenes are relatively commonplace these days. Anglers badger each other and sometimes argue over a bass plopped into a livewell instead of back into the lake from which it was pulled. Bumper stickers promoting catch-and-release fishing adorn trucks at boat ramp parking lots. And nowhere in magazines devoted to fishing, particularly bass fishing, do you see photographs of fish on stringers or milky-eyed dead fish. It's strictly taboo. Even cast-for-cash tournaments, where anglers compete with each other for sometimes astounding cash prizes, prohibit their entrants from killing a bass. For every one that goes belly-up in their livewell, contestants are penalized-severely.

It's hard for some bass anglers to admit, but in some cases the catch-and-release ethic has gone too far. Don't believe it? Our fisheries biologists have plenty of evidence to back up such a claim.

"Our creel surveys have documented bass release rates of up to 97 percent," noted John Odenkirk, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries biologist for Region V (Northern Virginia). "Hardly anybody keeps bass anymore. Because of the catch-and-release ethic, our slot limits are rendered useless. We can't really manipulate a population with a harvest restriction if no one is harvesting fish."

©David Hart

It's a common belief that if anglers return all the fish they catch back to the water, our lakes will be filled to the brim with bass. That may be true, said Odenkirk, but the vast majority of these bass will be what most anglers consider undesirable. Small bass, particularly fish in the 9- to 13-inch range, can dominate the overall population of a typical reservoir and squeeze themselves out of growing room.

"That's one reason we have slot limits. What can happen if bass are not harvested from a particular water is that fish may become stunted and we'll see slow growth and fish in generally poor condition," he said. "That's exactly what's happening in some of our lakes, particularly the smaller ones. We're getting a stockpiling of bass in the 9- to 12-inch range, and they are having a hard time growing," Odenkirk said.

In every niche in our woods or waters, there is a finite supply of food for every fish or animal that occupies it. Bass are no different. If the largemouth population increases unchecked, they simply compete for that limited forage base (food) and grow at a slower rate. It's common knowledge among our wildlife biologists and hunters that an overpopulation of deer can lead to stunted

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growth. Anglers have widely accepted the fact that bluegills can quickly overpopulate small waters and crowd themselves out of growing room. Bass are no different.

That's why it's a good thing, sometimes even necessary, to keep bass, particularly smaller ones. That's a hard concept for anglers to grasp, admitted Odenkirk, but it's something that's vitally important to our smaller lakes. With pressure on anglers from every direction to practice no-kill fishing, John and his colleagues are having a hard time convincing anglers to take fish from selected waters.

"We've posted signs at many of our lakes that explain the virtues of keeping smaller fish," added Odenkirk. "They seem to have worked in a few places, but on some other waters anglers just aren't keeping enough bass."

Lake Orange, a Department-owned lake in Orange County, is the perfect example of a lake with a size structure problem in the bass population. Odenkirk concluded a study that found too many bass under the 12-inch minimum size limit.

"In two hours of sampling, we caught 165 bass over eight inches long," he said. "Of those, 111 were under 12 inches. That's over two-thirds of all the bass. That's just too many small fish. Due to this stockpiling, a disproportionately low number of quality fish were present."

Odenkirk is planning to propose a 12- to 15-inch slot limit, or to simply remove the size limit altogether. That will allow anglers to cull some of those smaller fish—if he can convince anglers that utilize Orange to keep those pint-sized bass.

The intent of slot limits, which prohibit anglers from keeping bass between certain sizes (Lake Anna, for instance, has a 12- to 15-inch slot limit) is twofold. First, they are designed to give anglers the opportunity to keep fish for the dinner table, presumably smaller fish because

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they are more abundant, easier to catch and better table fare. Slot limits are also established to protect the fish that are at their peak size and age for spawning and controlling forage fish populations. Contrary to popular belief, the bigger, older females are not the prime egg layers.

What about keeping fish over the slot limit? Isn't that detrimental to a fishery? To some anglers, a four-pound largemouth is a catch of a lifetime and worthy of showing off to friends and family. To others, it's a nice addition to a tournament limit. But for most bass anglers, it's something to be admired and slipped back into the water to be caught another day.

"It has to be a matter of personal discretion," figured Odenkirk. Trophy fisheries notwithstanding "you simply can't deny someone the option of keeping a fish, no matter how big it is."

Tagging studies have proven that large fish are often caught several times and provide enjoyment and satisfaction to many anglers over the course of the bass's life. Those coveted trophy fish are hard to come by, most anglers would agree, so it may seem detrimental, perhaps even criminal, to keep such a bass.

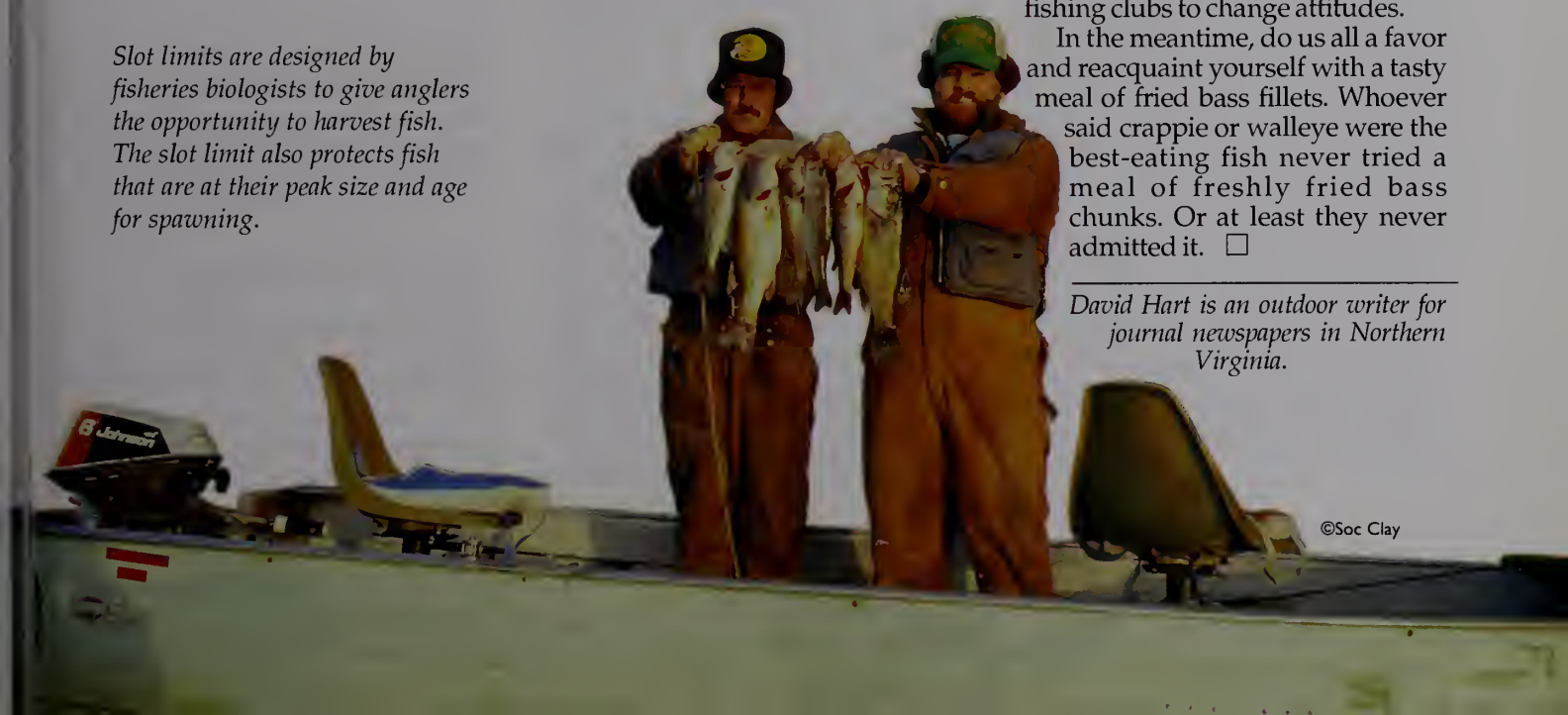
"In most cases, there are enough fish released that if a few bigger fish are kept for either food or as a trophy, the net effect on the overall population is marginal," he added. "Those fish are there for everyone to enjoy and if someone would enjoy that fish mounted on the wall, that's up to them. No one should feel ashamed or guilty for keeping a trophy bass."

Ultimately, Odenkirk realizes he and his colleagues have an uphill climb when it comes to convincing Virginia's anglers to change their way of thinking. Catch-and-release has been drilled into our heads for so long, and from so many different sides, that it may take more than a few magazine articles and talks to fishing clubs to change attitudes.

In the meantime, do us all a favor and reacquaint yourself with a tasty meal of fried bass fillets. Whoever said crappie or walleye were the best-eating fish never tried a meal of freshly fried bass chunks. Or at least they never admitted it. ☐

David Hart is an outdoor writer for journal newspapers in Northern Virginia.

Slot limits are designed by fisheries biologists to give anglers the opportunity to harvest fish. The slot limit also protects fish that are at their peak size and age for spawning.



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Journal

1997-98 Deer, Bear, and Turkey Harvest Information.

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries' Wildlife Division has completed the data compilation on the 1997-98 harvest of deer, bear and turkey. The data represents the number of animals checked and considered to be a minimum harvest count

During the 1997 deer season 197,955 deer were reported harvested by hunters in Virginia based on preliminary results. The 1997 total represents a 5.6 percent decrease from the 209,743 checked in 1996. One of the biggest changes in deer harvest levels appears to be related to a regulation change that limited bonus deer permits to one set per hunter per year in 1997.

A near record number of bears were harvested in Virginia in 1997. The recent harvest of 788 represents a 26.1 percent increase over the previous years harvest of 624, and shy of the 1993 record of 789.

As for fall turkey, hunters reported a total harvest of 11,168 birds during the 1997-98 season. The harvest was 5.9 percent lower than last year and may reflect lower reproductive success in the summer of 1997, particularly in counties east of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

If you would like a complete county by county listing of the deer, bear and turkey harvests please send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to the Information Desk, Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, P.O. Box 11104, Richmond, VA 23230-1104. □

Women Bass Fish, Too!

by Bonnie Phillips

Attention all ladies! Experience the fun of bass fishing, whether it's with your better half, the kids or by yourself. It's a wonderful way to enjoy the great outdoors, spend time with your family, and relax in peaceful surroundings.

As a child I always enjoyed fishing, but didn't get to go much. Shortly after I married, my husband and I rented a johnboat at Diaschund reservoir and I tried my luck at crappie and bass fishing. I loved it! I've been completely hooked on fishing ever since.

We purchased a johnboat of our own, a couple of rods and reels, and began our search for the elusive black back hawgs. Tucking my hair in a hat, grabbing a picnic lunch, and settling our four-year-old beside us, we were off each weekend for another adventure.

After a harried week at the office, nothing was more inviting than a day on the water—without phones, televisions, or radios. Cruising reservoirs and lakes, soaking up the warm rays of sunlight, nothing was more relaxing.

We quickly graduated from a johnboat to a full size bass boat. As my daughter grew up fishing with us, she experienced the joys of water-skiing and swimming when the fish weren't biting. It was a great way for the family to spend time together talking about past experiences, and to encounter new ones. Like the time my husband caught a giant turtle, my daughter caught her first little fish, and I caught my first big fish. When my daughter went away to college, she wrote home about memories of fishing, and how peanut butter crackers reminded her of those wonderful summer days, spent munching on crackers, sipping cold drinks, dozing in the sun, and occasionally catching a fish.

My husband and I are still searching for the big ones. He fishes tournaments, and I occasionally fish one with him.

More and more women are experiencing the fun of bass fishing, like Jean Terry, President of Virginia's Bassin' Gals. She started fishing tournaments in 1985, after her husband showed her a brochure he'd picked up at a fishing show. "My husband agrees that after he taught me how to back the boat down a ramp, he no longer had a bass boat," Terry said.

"Our club teaches women how to handle a trailer and boat, tie lures, use a trolling motor, and fish. We encourage respect for other water users, as well as good fishing practices, and do it in a helpful and friendly way." To get more information on Bassin' Gals, call Jean at, (804) 743-0654, or write her at 5700 Sara Kay Dr., Richmond, Va., 23237.

The Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries also offers workshops, such as, "Becoming an Outdoors Woman," which is held in May. For more information, call Libby Norris at (757) 253-7072. □

Virginia Outdoor Writers Announce Youth Contest Winners

The Virginia Outdoor Writers Association announced that Hunter Jones of Keswick, VA, took first

place in the annual Youth Writing Competition for 1997-98, with his article, "A Rainbow on the Jackson River, " according to contest chairman Spike Knuth. Jones is an 11th grader at St. Anne's Belfield School. (The winning entry is published below). Second place went to Martin R. Villa of Crozet, who attends Western Albemarle High School, with third place going to Garrett Holden at Nansemond Suffolk Academy in Chesapeake. Chad Collins of Mechanicsville who attends the New Community School, earned an honorable mention.

The first three places were awarded their plaques and merchandise prizes on March 18, 1998 at VOWA's spring business meeting at the Holiday Inn Monticello in Charlottesville. The Berkley Corporation donated a rod; Daiwa Corporation a rod; Cabela's an Eagel spinning reel; DuPont Stren a knife and hook sharpener, a digital scale and fishing line and Pro Bass donated three redhead backpacks.

The theme this year was "A Personal Fishing Experience." The contest is open to all Virginia students in grades 9 through 12. The 1998-99 theme will be "A Personal Wildlife Experience" and will be announced in October, 1998. For information call Spike Knuth 804-367-1344. □

A Rainbow on the Jackson River

by Hunter Jones

Editor's Note: Hunter Jones, a student at St. Anne's Belfield in Keswick, took first place honors in the Virginia Outdoors Writers Association Youth Writing Contest. Virginia Wildlife *is pleased to reprint his winning story.*

We started at the gate that crosses over the dirt road, leading through the first meadow which covers the valley floor between rising slopes of the Alleghenies. These mountains, mottled by varying greens of late summer foliage, threw a shadow on the grass, already beginning to show a tinge of autumn brown. A light breeze swept over the mountains and through the waves of grass. It whipped the settled, early morning fog, revealing our dark figures of this early hour stumbling through the meadow, rigged fly rods slung over our shoulders. As we walked, the faint light of dawn slowly receded as sunlight filled the valley and the mountains around us. Just when the dirt path led us into the forest at the side of the mountains, the orange sphere of the sun crested the horizon of the mountaintop and reflected a new, brighter light through the forest and valley. The path led through the beautiful woods of western Virginia. Tall, thick pines towered over us and matted grounds of pine needles cushioned every step. Dense canopies of thick, dark green rhododendron leaves

Hunter Jones, first place winner of The Virginia Outdoors Writers Association Youth Writing Contest, is congratulated by VOWAA President, Spike Knuth.

lead all the way up the side of the mountain. To our left ran a tumbling stream of gray boulders and green water with currents flowing around the rocks, over beds of gravel, against undercut banks, shadowing mysterious, dark pockets of the slower water. The riffles and deep pools held the beautiful and acrobatic rainbow trout, and the large but discouragingly wise brown trout, thick in the body and full of fight.

My dad and I were fishing the Jackson River in Hidden Valley in Bath County, a gem of crystalline water flowing through national forests. We had wet a line many times in the little streams of the Shenandoah National Park, where the colorful brook trout flourish, but it was the size of the Jackson tumbling through ever-present mountains, that was totally foreign to us. Like any new angler on a new stream I had my worries that I might have trouble adapting my small stream tactics to a river with a little more water and width to it. But no matter what the outcome of this newest fishing adventure, I knew that I might leave with memories filed away in an ongoing catalogue of remembrance, along with other big fish and other beautiful rivers. Trout or no trout, I would be casting loops of flyline under canopies of leaves rippling in cool mountain breezes; and I would, like Henry David Thoreau wrote, "see if I could not learn what [the woods] had to teach" to me, as I probed the new waters of the Jackson.

I had spotted the fish holding among submerged boulders in the pool, casually rising to small insects that quietly danced over the surface of the shifting waters, dropping occasionally into the film of the river. I waded carefully onto the gravel bed of the opposite bank, a steady grip with my right hand on the wet cork of my light fly rod's handle, the lightly hackled, parachute Adams in my left. Dropping the fly into the water below me I began to work out a quickly building loop of flyline, swishing through the heavy air of late summer's afternoon. I pushed the rod forward and let loose the line, an unfolding parabola above the surface of the water, which turned the fine leader over nicely and landed the fly quietly, upstream from the rising trout.

As the Adams, suspended above the gravel streambed by the smooth, glassy surface of the water, floated downstream, the trout rose effortlessly through the clear waters of the

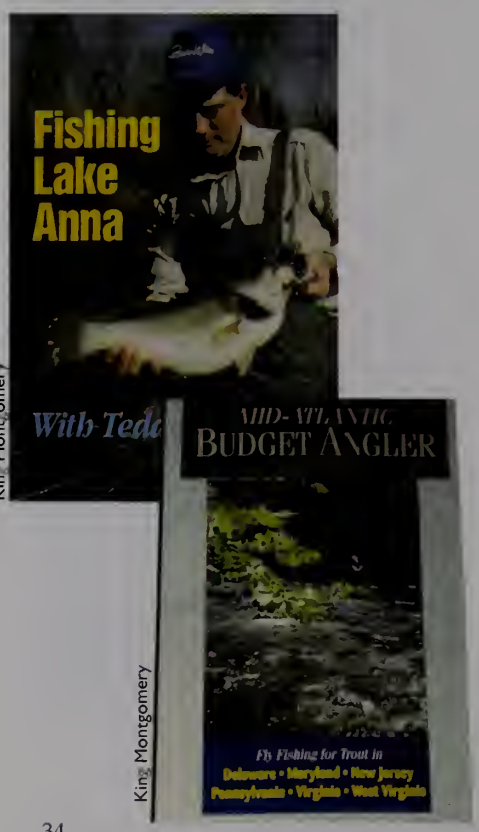
pool, and slowly inspected the wisps of feather. Then at the end of my drift he lifted his head, poked his nose up through the waters and engulfed my fly. He jumped, careened, and headed upstream, peeling line off the reel, like a torpedo misplaced in the Jackson River. Having come to the net, I held the rainbow trout, several inches more than a foot long, with a crimson stripe along his flank and among silver sides, and an olive green back, marked by dark spots of black covering his body. Before slipping him back into the flowing waters. I lifted my rainbow from the river, letting the cold, mountain water of the Jackson glaze him in a silver reflection. I then gently released him to fight again into the currents of this wonderful river. ☐

Reviews

by King Montgomery

Two recently published books will be of interest to Virginia anglers; one about Lake Anna, and the other on fly fishing mid-Atlantic trout streams, including some of Virginia's finest.

Fishing Lake Anna by Teddy Carr, PPC Publications, 1997, soft-cover, 148 pages, $ 12.95. Teddy is a young bass fishing guide who has fished Lake Anna since it was formed in 1972; he literally grew up fishing the lake. In his book, Teddy shares his bass catching secrets; the lures, the tactics, the places, and the myriad of subtle little things that set apart successful anglers from the rest. Teddy discusses how to fish during the different seasons and, using excellent maps, where to fish as well. Consider this book as the Lake Anna fishing bible. Available in many tackle shops or call (301) 937-0010 or (540) 854-4271 to order.



King Montgomery

King Montgomery

Mid-Atlantic Budget Angler by Ann McIntosh, Stackpole Books, 1998, soft-cover, 247 pages, $16.95. This is a comprehensive guide to more than 100 premier trout streams in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, and West Virginia. It includes helpful maps, directions, places to stay and to eat, and hatch information so you take along the best flies. Ann also lists fly shops and guides in each area. It is also a well-written and fun book that entertains as well as informs. Poor Ann, she had to fish all these trout streams to write this book! Available in bookstores or call Stackpole Books at 800-732-3669. ☐

Book Review:

Highroad Guide to the Virginia Mountains

Local outdoor writer and senior outdoor columnist for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* Garvey Winegar and his wife Deane Winegar, herself an award-winning outdoor writer and nature photographer, have picked up their pen and paper and taken to the high road. Just in time for your summer vacation planning the Winegars have joined with publisher, Longstreet Press of Atlanta to participate in a series of books called "The Highroad Guides." The first five books in the series are *The Highroad Guides to Georgia, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Virginia Mountains.*

When it comes to Virginia and it's magnificent mountains Garvey and Deane can truly say that they have been there, done that. If you like to hunt, fish, camp, bike, hike, or just enjoy a leisurely drive down one of the many scenic roads through Virginia's highlands then this book will fill your every need. But what sets this book apart is the great lengths that its authors have gone through to make this exceptional guide.

You will find information on everything from state and national parks, national forests, and nature preserves, with first hand information from biologists, naturalists, geologists, and outfitters. But after reading through this guide you will find that the Winegars have pulled out all the stops. In the words of Garvey Winegar, "Unlike other books on the market, our guide goes to great lengths to tie in natural history with the various sites. What geologic forces are responsible for this amazing rock formation? Are there black bears in the area? Why are the hepatica white on one side of the mountain and pink on the other? What's causing the red oaks to die on the ridge? And why are there more salamander species in the Southern Appalachians than anywhere on earth? In short, we've tried to write the most comprehensive guide available for those who love the mountains."

If you crave what the outdoors has to offer, then you'll love this book. I have to say that I have never had so much fun, learning so much from one book than I have reading *Highroad Guide to Virginia Mountains.* The Winegars are to be commended for entertaining and educating folks on the marvels of Virginia's resounding natural resources. This is one book that I promise will spend more time in your hands than on a bookshelf gathering dust.

Highroad Guide to the Virginia Mountains, is available in stores now. However you can order autographed copies directly from Garvey and Deane Winegar at 198 Bear Den Road, Waynesboro, VA 22980 or by E-mailing at **garveyw@cfw.com** Cost is $18.95 plus $2.50 postage and .85 tax (Total $22.30). ☐

MAY AFIELD

by Jack Randolph

After the deluge that hit us last winter I wonder if April showers alone can take credit for the gorgeous wildflowers that will carpet our forest floors this month. This is the time when the forested mountains of the Old Dominion shine, setting a beautiful backdrop for a variety of outdoor adventures.

The beauty of the May forest offers an experience the entire family can enjoy. It is a wonderful opportunity for sportsmen to repay their families for the many hunting and fishing weekends they spent away from them. The mountains are alive with the gentle pastel hues of trilliums, mayapples, violets, and many, many other wildflowers. Armed with a good book on wildflower identification the family can enjoy the rare experience of discovering and identifying beautiful blossoms together. Two excellent books for this purpose are *Newcomb's Wildflower Guide*, by Lawrence Newcomb or *The Audubon Society Field Guide to North American Wildflowers* (Eastern Region).

The colorful May forest provides a rare setting for many exciting springtime sports. In southeastern Virginia the shad continue to surge up the Meherrin and Nottoway rivers. These rivers, not being a part of the Chesapeake Bay watershed, are open for shad fishing which continues throughout the month.

On other eastern tidal rivers, those that flow to the Chesapeake, any white or American shad caught must be returned unharmed to the water, although anglers may keep the smaller hickory shad. Good fishing for hickory shad seldom holds up beyond mid-May in these waters, but until then excellent sport may be enjoyed on the Appomattox, Pamunkey, Mattaponi, Rappahannock and Potomac rivers.

River herring will also be encountered with the shad, but generally the best hook and line river herring fishing will be found at Walkers Dam on the Chickahominy and on the Appomattox River in Petersburg below the Powerhouse. Herring are also encountered in the Rappahannock in the City of Fredericksburg.

The only successful spawning run of landlocked striped bass takes place in the Staunton and Dan rivers above Buggs Island Lake. The runs usually start in April and extend into May. Anglers catch stripers from both rivers during this run.

In the other lakes where landlocked striped bass reside, the fish make heroic efforts to spawn each spring, but the waterflow conditions are simply not sufficient to provide the environment required for the eggs to survive. On Smith Mountain Lake, for example, stripers on an unsuccessful spawning mission invade Witcher Creek. The fish here are so vulnerable to snagging that special regulations prohibiting weighted hooks are in effect from April 15 through May 31.

On the other hand, schools of landlocked striped bass from Lake Gaston, also on an unsuccessful spawning mission, gather below Kerr Dam where they are fair game for casters with surf rods that heave bucktails and large plugs at them.

Less known, and far less spectacular than the striped bass run, is what is known as the "Mulberry Hatch" on some rivers. Carp and catfish have a strong affinity for ripe mulberries. They love to lie downstream of a mulberry tree and slurp the berries as they drift with the current. All one needs is a mulberry tree growing over the water, an ample supply of carp and catfish, and some fairly good timing. Simply bait a small hook with a berry or two and let the bait drift, unhindered, in the current.

This is also prime time for those big, slab-sided red-eared sunfish, called "shellcrackers." For Virginians, shellcracker city is the City of Suffolk where Lakes Prince and Western Branch wrestle for honors each year. Generally, the best baits are red wiggler worms fished plumb on the bottom. Some guys say they can be caught on popping bugs if you let them sit still long enough. I'm not quite sure how long "long enough" is.

May is a prime month for trout. There is generally plenty of water in the steams and plenty of trout in the water. There are enough active insects to tempt the most ignorant hatchery trout, and the trout streams have something to offer trout fishermen of virtually any persuasion.

Of course, for many sportsmen, the great spring gobbler hunt is the centerpiece of their May activities. If one is lucky enough to hold a weekend pass he can hunt Saturday and fish Saturday afternoon and Sunday. I used to dearly love to parlay morning turkey hunts at Fort A.P. Hill with a later few hours of shad fishing at Fredericksburg. It is surprising how much action you can cram into a May day if you start early enough.

Sadly, the beauty and high adventure of hunting wily spring gobblers is often spoiled by a hunting accident. The great spring hunt can be dangerous, particularly if one doesn't really know how to hunt turkeys. If you are new to the game, do your best to learn what you can. If anything, learn respect for the bird and the sport. The chances are just about 100 percent that the turkey you sneak up on isn't a turkey at all—it's just another hunter. The turkey you bag is one you fooled into sneaking up on you! ☐

RECIPES

by Jone Cone

Bluefish–For Action And Eating

Bluefish require extra special handling from the moment they are caught. This will insure good eating. Since bluefish meat is soft, your fish should be placed immediately on ice in a cooler. As soon as arriving home, your larger fish should be filleted and the fillets skinned. Then remove the strip of dark, oily meat that runs up each side just under the skin. Do not scale fish you want to fillet. Bluefish fillets yield 41.04 percent of the whole fish.

It is best to eat your fish before having to freeze them. They hold up only about six weeks in a freezer before becoming stronger in flavor.

Menu

Marinated Tangy Bluefish Fillets
Mushroom Pilaf
Stuffed Zucchini
Cucumber Sour Cream Mold
Strawberries 'n Cream Dessert

Marinated Tangy Bluefish Fillets

This recipe uses the acid in tomatoes and lemonade to break down the fats and oils. This is an excellent way to prepare other oily fish.

2 pounds fish fillets
⅓ cup butter or margarine, melted
⅓ cup catsup
⅓ cup frozen lemonade concentrate, thawed
1 tablespoon prepared mustard
¼ teaspoon garlic salt
1 bay leaf, crumbled

Thaw fish if frozen. Cut fish fillets into serving-size portions. Place fish in a single layer in a baking dish. Combine remaining ingredients, mix well and pour over fish. Turn fish to coat evenly. Cover and marinate in refrigerator at least 30 minutes. Arrange fish on a well-greased broiler pan. Brush with sauce. Broil about 4 inches from the source of heat for 4 to 5 minutes. Turn carefully and brush with sauce. Broil 4 to 5 minutes longer or until fish flakes easily when test with a fork. Serves 6.

Mushroom Pilaf

1 cup sliced fresh mushrooms
⅓ cup chopped onion
2 tablespoons butter or margarine
¾ cup uncooked long grain rice
1¾ plus 2 tablespoons water
2 packets very low sodium chicken-flavored broth
¼ teaspoon basil leaves
Pepper to taste

In a large saucepan, cook mushrooms and onion in butter until tender. Stir in rice, cook and stir over medium-high heat until rice is golden brown. Stir in remaining ingredients and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and simmer 15 minutes or until liquid is absorbed, stirring occasionally. Serves 4

Stuffed Zucchini

3 medium-size zucchini
1 package (10 ounces) frozen chopped spinach, cooked and drained
2 tablespoons flour
½ cup milk
⅓ cup shredded sharp Cheddar cheese
Paprika

Preheat oven to 350°. Trim off ends of zucchini and cook whole in boiling water 10 to 12 minutes. Drain well. Halve lengthwise and scoop out centers; set zucchini shells aside. Mix scooped-out zucchini with cooked spinach. In a large saucepan, blend flour and milk; add spinach mixture. Cook filling until thickened. Place zucchini shells in a shallow baking dish. Spoon filling into shells, top with cheese and sprinkle with paprika. Bake in a preheated oven for 15 to 20 minutes or until hot. Makes 6 servings.

Cucumber Sour Cream Mold

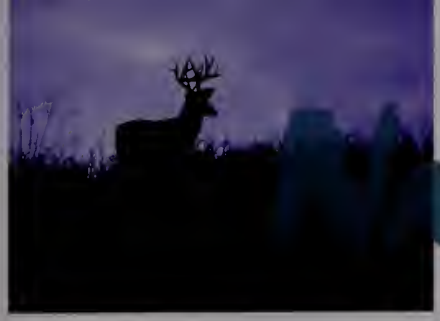
1 package (8 serving size) lime-flavored gelatin dessert
¼ teaspoon salt
1½ cups boiling water
1 tablespoon lemon juice
1½ cups cold water
½ cup Miracle Whip Salad Dressing
½ cup sour cream
1½ cups chopped, seeded, peeled cucumber
1 teaspoon dillweed

Stir boiling water into gelatin and salt at least 2 minutes until completely dissolved. Stir in lemon juice and cold water. Refrigerate until slightly thickened (consistency of unbeaten egg whites). Mix salad dressing and sour cream in a small bowl until well-blended. Stir into thickened gelatin mixture. Refrigerate about 15 minutes or until thickened. Stir in cucumbers and dillweed. Pour into a 5-cup mold. Refrigerate 4 hours or until firm. Unmold and garnish as desired. Makes 10 servings.

Strawberries 'n Cream Dessert

1 (8-inch) plain or lemon angel food cake
1 can (14 ounces) sweetened condensed milk
¼ cup lemon juice
1 carton (16 ounces) frozen whipped topping, thawed
2 pints strawberries, hulled and sliced
Plastic wrap

Cut angel food cake in half. Tear half of cake into bite-size pieces. Place cake pieces in bottom of a 4-quart glass bowl or trifle dish. Combine sweetened condensed milk and lemon juice; stir until thickened. Stir in whipped topping. Spread half of lemon mixture over cake pieces. Layer half of strawberries over lemon mixture. Tear remaining half of cake into bite-size pieces and place cake pieces over strawberries. Repeat layers with remaining ingredients. Cover bowl with plastic wrap and refrigerate at least 4 hours or overnight. Makes 14 servings.



Naturally Wild

by Spike Knuth

Rose-breasted Grosbeak

I watched from a distance as 5 or 6 stocky-looking birds clambered about the barren branches and long seed pods of a still-dormant catalpa tree. At times the birds hung upside down and climbed around almost parrot-like as they carefully searched the long bean-like pods for any leftover seeds. It was late March, long before the catalpa would be sprouting leaves. Even through binoculars, I was having difficulty making out any colors against the almost white overcast sky. I could only study the silhouettes to look for something recognizable. As my eyes adjusted to the situation, I was able to make out a dark head with light underside and an unmistakable triangular throat and breast patch. Rose-breasted grosbeaks were making an unusually early spring appearance to east central Wisconsin.

Here in Virginia that may not have been as unusual, but even here they usually don't appear until mid- or late-April just before or along with migrating warblers. The last week of April is probably the peak time to watch for them. I've seen them in the variable habitat of a highway wayside in Albemarle County and high in an oak tree while hiking around Mountain Lake in Giles County. You may see them in the black locusts or other flowering trees in coastal or piedmont Virginia where they eat the new buds and blossoms. In fact, while northern breeders add their colors to those of migrating warblers heading for points north, there are many rose-breasted grosbeaks that nest in the Alleghenies and Appalachians south to northern Georgia.

These birds are about the size of a cardinal but a bit heavier looking, with shorter tails and a large whitish, cone-shaped bill. The male is basically black above, white underneath with a triangular-shaped red patch on its throat and breast, a field mark which gives rise to the nickname "throat cut!" He also has a rosy red underwing patch, and a white patch and bars on his black wings which are relatively long and pointed. The female resembles a large sparrow with basic buffy brown coloration with darker brownish-gray streaks on its breast and back, a striped crown and white wing bars. Later, young-of-the-year males look much like the female but with the rosy red wash on the breast and underwings.

Rose-breasted grosbeaks are birds of mixed woodlands, forest edges, cut-over areas and thickets within those areas. They'll also visit parks with similar habitat, orchards and farmlands, especially if there is water nearby. Early in the year they feed on tree buds and blossoms, turning to a variety of insects in summer such as beetles, worms and caterpillars. Come late-summer and fall, they turn to wild fruits and berries, and seeds of many plants using its big, conical bill which was designed to crush hard seed hulls in order to get at the "meat."

The males arrive ahead of the females choosing territories and elevated singing positions to attract a female. Observers who have seen its courtship flight say that during courtship they perform a flight song as they flutter into the air with feet dangling. Its usual song is much like a robin's, although faster and more musical. Its call or warning note is a sharp metallic "kik" or "chink." Often, you may think a calling rose-breasted is many yards away when it could be in a small tree nearby. Actually, hearing its call may be the only way to know the bird is around since it tends to stay hidden in thick vegetation. In fact, its scientific name means "inclined to avoid," or "retiring."

Once paired up, nesting usually begins in mid-or late-May. The nest could be built in about any kind of tree, they don't appear to have a preference. Usually it's a smaller one up about 15 feet, but sometimes as low as six. It's loosely constructed of the usual materials such as small twigs, dried vegetable fibers, grasses and lined with finer grasses, rootlets and animal hair. About 3 to 5 eggs, pale greenish blue in color, and speckled with rufous brown, are laid. The male assists in incubation as well as feeding the young, especially when the female begins her second brood.

With the coming of fall and after molting, the males become silent and duller in color. They begin migrating as early as August and are usually gone from the states by late-October. They winter across the Gulf of Mexico in southern Mexico, the Yucatan Peninsula, Venezuela and Ecuador. □

Illustration by Spike Knuth

Photo Tips

by Lynda Richardson

Focusing on Flower Power

Rays of sun light were just beginning to glow across the meadow as I stepped from a forest path. Scanning the area, I was pleased to view a sea of heavy heads, a field of flowers bowing under the weight of morning dew. Bringing the tripod down from my shoulder, I looked around at the smorgasbord of subject matter. Where should I begin?

When planning to photograph flowers I usually grab my camera, a 100mm macro lens, two extension tubes, a sturdy tripod, a reflector, and then hurry down to the nearby meadow for a predawn shoot. If you don't have a macro lens don't worry because there are other options. Some photography shops sell close-up filters which screw into the front of your lens and magnify your subject. By adding several close-up filters you can get up close and personal with flowery subjects. The quality of your photograph won't be as good as with a real macro lens but you can still get beautiful results.

If all you have is a 50mm lens, it is possible to take that lens off of the camera and reverse it, holding it tightly to the front of your camera. (Some camera manufacturers have an adapter ring which will hold it in place for you.) Believe it or not, shooting in this fashion will give you great results.

Another option is using a telephoto lens for shooting flowers. I have used 200mm, 300mm, and 500mm lenses with extension tubes to photograph flowers (and butterflies and dragonflies) from a distance and have gotten some fabulous shots. Extension tubes are placed between the camera and lens and allows you to focus a telephoto lens closer than normal. Though you will loose infinity focus, this is a another great way to shoot flowers and achieve a different look. One aspect of telephoto lenses that makes them so appealing is their tendency to compress distances making everything appear closer together. Knowing this and putting it to use with a minimum depth of field can produce romantic photographs of flowers surrounded by swirls of color.

I find light, or the lack of it, a very important aspect of the perfect flower photograph. Overcast days provide the opportunity for capturing velvety, rich colors with slide films such as Fuji Velvia. The perfect glow of a golden sunset or sunrise can bathe your subject in warm hues. But, bright sunny days which may feel wonderful to the spirit are not so great for shooting flowers. Strong light tends to wash out color and create harsh shadows which distract from the subject.

A Pink Lady's Slipper photographed in diffused light (1) looks much different with the sudden appearance of harsh sunlight (2). Photos by Lynda Richardson.

Now that you've figured out what lens you will use and under what lighting conditions, let's get a little more technical. Shooting under overcast lighting situations with low ISO films usually means having to use slower shutter speeds meaning...tripod. I use a big sturdy tripod with a ball head. The legs of my Gitzo tripod can be spread out to nearly ground level or adjusted to rocky, sloping terrain. If that doesn't get me low enough I can turn the central column upside down and replace it in the tripod for shots inches from the ground.

If your hands are a bit shaky or you're shooting at really slow shutter speeds like 1–15th and below, you may want to trigger your camera with a shutter release. A shutter release is a cable which can manually or electrically release the shutter of your camera reducing any movement hands my create.

Shutter releases are great when the air is still, but if a breeze kicks up you may be in trouble. A slight breeze can really mess up a day of photographing flowers. That is why many flower photographers choose to shoot in the early morning or late evening when the winds are still.

Another motion problem you might face is created when you are too close to your flowery subjects. Using anything closer than a 100mm macro, the warmth of your body or breath entering the cool air around a flower at dawn can create just enough of a vortex to move the subject.

Don't forget to experiment when photographing flowers. Lay on your back beneath a field of flowers and shoot skyward with fill flash. Try a bellows attachment and get intimately close. Allow the flowers to move in your photographs and capture their dance with the wind. When you enter that meadow or forest woodland for a morning of photography, enjoy your discovery of the power of the flower. ☐

On The Water

by Kathy Gillikin, Boating Education Instructor

Springing Into Spring

As the rain, snow and cold temperatures diminish, most boaters begin dreaming about the upcoming summer months on the water. Now is the time to prepare yourself for the summer boating season. You may have already prepared your boat and engines for the season, but have you prepared your family and yourself? Listed below are some thoughts to consider before your first excursion for the summer.

1. Refresh your memory of boating laws, equipment requirements and navigation rules. Don't forget that the General Assembly may have made some changes; keep checking your newspaper for these updates or call the water patrol enforcement units in your area for the latest information. Check your equipment to make sure it is still in serviceable condition. Maintain your boat and equipment properly to reduce equipment failure.

2. Prepare your family for your boating excursions. Fit each potential passenger with a U.S. Coast Guard approved personal flotation device (PFD). Children grow taller every year and may need larger sizes. The Department of Game and Inland Fisheries recommends that everyone wear a PFD, especially children and non-swimmers. (Type I or II PFDs are designed to turn an unconscious person face-up.) Review boating laws and boat operation with family members. Plan for emergencies; who will take over if something happens to the skipper? Communicate the safety rules for your boat and enforce them. Teach your children about the logical consequences of not being safe on a boat (personal injury, damage, citation, death). Allow the opportunity for family members to learn how to swim. TAKE A FREE BOATING SAFETY CLASS TOGETHER.

National Safe Boating Week

May 16-22 is National Safe Boating Week. This is the week set aside by the National Safe Boating Council and state boating regulatory agencies to focus on boating safety and prepare for a safe boating season. This year's theme is "Wear Your Life Jacket! Boat Smart From the Start." Many localities will be offering free boat safety checks, information on accident prevention, safety courses and children's programs. Please look for activities listed in your local newspapers or contact your local television/radio stations, marinas, boat dealers or Regional Boating Education Coordinators for any activities in your area. Be responsible first, be safe second and you'll have fun.

Mel White

Congratulations to Robert L. Patterson of Bon Air, Virginia for winning the 1997 Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, Personal Watercraft Safety Course, PWC giveaway. Mr. Patterson 's name was drawn from a list of all the students who successfully completed the Personal Watercraft Safety Course last year. The new Sea-Doo was donated by Bombardier Motor Corporation of America, in conjunction with Honda House of Richmond, Virginia. ***Left to right:*** *Kathy Gillikin, Boating Education Instructor, William L. Woodfin Jr., Director of DGIF and Robert L. Patterson.*

Resource Information

Call your Regional Boating Education Coordinator with your education questions:
Richmond Area - 270-4580; Tidewater - 757-898-8151; South Central - 540-774-2619; Southwest - 540-835-9617; Blue Ridge - 804-823-2277; Northern Virginia - 703-866-5853

Try a Different Boat Ramp

- Accomack County—Chesconessex Creek: from Onancock north on Rt. 658 (.7M), left on Rt. 653 (2M), right on 655 (1.3M), ahead on Rt. 649 (.1M) to ramp
- Campbell County—Brookneal, Staunton River: town of Brookneal off Rt. 40 and 501 south
- Nelson County—Wingina, James River: south on Rt. 56 of Wingina
- Orange County—Lake Orange: from Orange east on Rt. 20 (2.2M), right on Rt. 629 (2M), left on Rt. 739 (.6M) to ramp
- Scott County—Crafts Mill, Clinch River: from Fort Blackmore west on Rt. 65 (7.4M), left on Rt. 645 at hill (.2M), left on Rt. 729 to river access.

Celebrate National Fishing Week

Enter the Kids-N-Fishing Photo Contest

©Dwight Dyke

"Picture it!" Catch the moment of excitement on your child's face as he or she catches a fish. Then enter your photo in the Kids-N-Fishing Photo Contest sponsored by the Virginia Department of Game and Inland Fisheries, KW Fishing Services and *Hooked For Life* (HFL) kids fishing magazine. Three of the young anglers in those photographs will be chosen to receive prizes.

No need to be a professional photographer. A snapshot will do!

Winning photographs will be those that best capture the theme "Fish a While and Catch a Smile."

First prize: a half day guided fishing trip for the child and one adult on Swift Creek Reservoir (courtesy of KW Fishing Services, Midlothian, Virginia), a rod and reel and a HFL subscription.

Second prize: a rod and reel and a HFL subscription.

Third prize: a HFL subscription.

Contest rules: Children must be between 5 and 12 years old. Photographs must be submitted by May 29, 1998. Only one photograph per child accepted. Judging will take place during National Fishing Week, May 30 through June 7, 1998. The name and address of the child must accompany the photograph. Prizes will be sent direct to the winning children. *Photos will not be returned* and may be used in other VDGIF promotional materials.

To enter: send a photo with the child's name and address to:
Virginia Department of Game
and Inland Fisheries
c/o Anne Skalski
Photo Contest
4010 West Broad St.
Richmond, VA 23230-1104

NATIONAL FISHING WEEK
MAY 30 – JUNE 7, 1998
Catch a smile.